

INTERNATIONAL SOLUTIONS TO NATIONAL PROBLEMS

*German teachers' perceptions of the PISA 2000
study*

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Tiivistelmä/Referat – Abstract <p>This master's thesis examines German teachers' initial experience of the first PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) study. German pupils' low PISA scores caused a public and political shock in German educational discussion at the beginning of the 2000s. As a case example, teachers in the largest union of educational workers in Germany, the Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft (GEW) are scrutinised using the GEW's membership magazine, Erziehung und Wissenschaft (E&W) as research material. Examining teachers as a case group provides deepening insights into the extent to which PISA affected the educational self-understanding in Germany.</p> <p>The objective is to contribute to the understanding of how international comparative studies influence educational discourse in a national context. Educational researchers have criticised the acceptance of PISA as an indicator of success between school systems and the extent it affects educational policy, drawing attention to PISA's institutional background as initiated by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). In the light of the criticism, the analysis focuses on the GEW actors' perception of PISA as an institution. The research material is analysed from the perspective of history of ideas and policy analysis with an attempt to trace the experiences of the various actors within the GEW. Through Reinhard Koselleck's concepts of space of experience and horizon of expectations, the actors' conceptualisation of their past, present and future is elucidated. Carol Bacchi's analytic tool for studying problem representations by probing them with questions guides the methodological approach.</p> <p>The analysis shows that the PISA results were seen to reveal the problems of German education and to indicate the successful educational policy of the high-ranking countries. The PISA discussion concentrated on arguing against certain structural and cultural aspects of German education that were perceived to be problematic. Although the research material illustrated some multiplicity of political opinion within the organisation, the GEW's resistance to the tripartite German school system became a prominent message in the magazine. The high PISA scores in other countries thus functioned as arguments for comprehensive schooling. Additionally, teachers' attitudes and values were depicted as the problems of German education compared to successful countries.</p> <p>These discourses portrayed Germany to be far behind in international educational development. Consequently, other countries were often viewed as a homogeneous group. German education was likewise treated as an entity, despite the federal structure of the German school system. Attention was, therefore, hardly paid to the contextual factors behind each country's educational system. Rather, the ranking positions were seen to indicate the success or failure of the system.</p> <p>Based on the E&W material analysed in this thesis, the institutional background of PISA was not discussed within the GEW. It is noteworthy that although free trade and market-orientation were perceived to threaten public education, PISA and the OECD were not discussed in this context. Moreover, German educational tradition, known as Bildung, was not considered to be in conflict with the OECD's conceptualisation of education, although this has caused criticism among many German educationists.</p> <p>There was a selective tendency of how arguments were framed with PISA and what was considered successful. The assumptions and silences conveyed a tone of absolute certainty regarding what ought to result from PISA; it was represented as scientific evidence contrasting the perceived ideological policymaking in Germany. Despite the rigid dichotomies in the arguments, the assertions surrounding PISA came to reflect the ambiguity of the argumentation that previous research has also pointed out in the PISA discourses. The assertions and beliefs concerning PISA were not eventually coherent, yet the contradictions were not discussed in the magazine. The analysis of the E&W material demonstrates a typical example of taking PISA as a given authority and using the assessment results to legitimise political arguments in national debates. The results support previous concerns regarding the need for further consideration of the political function and influence of large-scale educational assessments.</p>			
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Tiivistelmä/Referat – Abstract <p>OECD:n toteuttama koululaisten osaamista mittaava PISA-tutkimus (Programme for International Student Assessment) aiheutti shokin saksalaisessa koulutuskeskustelussa joulukuussa 2001, kun Saksa sijoittui odotettua heikommin. Tässä pro gradu –työssä tarkastellaan saksalaisten opettajien ensitulkintoja tilanteesta keskittyen PISA-keskusteluun Saksan suurimman opettajajärjestön GEW:in (Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft) jäsenlehdessä E&W:ssä (Erziehung und Wissenschaft). Tutkimusasetelma nojaa kasvatus- ja koulutustieteilijöiden huomioihin ylikansallisten toimijoiden lisääntyvästä koulutuspoliittisesta vaikutusvallasta. Aiemman kritiikin valossa tutkimusintressinä on opettajien suhtautuminen myös PISA:n institutionaaliseen taustaan. Syventymällä yksittäisen ryhmän PISA-keskusteluun tutkielma pyrkii lisäämään ymmärrystä laajamittaisten vertailevien tutkimusten vaikutuksista kansallisen tason koulutusdiskursseihin.</p> <p>Tutkimusmateriaalia analysoidaan aatehistorian ja politiikan analyysin näkökulmista. Teoreettisilta lähtökohdilta tutkielma nojaa Reinhard Koselleckin kokemustilan ja odotushorisontin käsitteisiin, joiden avulla GEW:n jäsenten PISA-tulkintoja eritellään historiallisten toimijoiden omassa ajassaan rakentamina käsityksinä menneestä ja tulevasta. Carol Bacchin työkalu yhteiskunnallisten ongelmanmäärittelyiden analysoimiseen puolestaan ohjaa avaamaan opettajien argumentaatioon sisältyviä taustaoletuksia ja aukkoja.</p> <p>GEW:n lehdessä PISA-tulosten nähtiin todistavan saksalaisen koulupolitiikan väitetyt ongelmakohdat. Huolimatta lehden paikoin moniäänisestä sisällöstä ja lukijakunnasta keskeiseksi viestiksi muodostui tulkinta saksalaisesta koulujärjestelmästä epätasa-arvoa tuottavana mekanismina, jota oli lähdettävä uudistamaan PISA-tulosten viitoittamalla tiellä. PISA-kirjoittelussa painottui GEW:in vastustus Saksan vallitsevaa hierarkkista rinnakkaiskoulujärjestelmää kohtaan: tärkeimpänä muiden maiden menestystekijänä esitettiin yhtenäiskoulujärjestelmä ja siihen liittyviksi oletetut kulttuuriset arvot sekä opettajien asenteet. Syntyi vaikutelma, että Saksa oli jäänyt jälkeen kansainvälisestä kehityksestä, jota muiden maiden uskottiin seuranneen. Näin ollen ongelmanmäärittelyistä välittyi sekä ulkomaiden esittäminen homogeenisenä massana että saksalaisen koulun kuvaaminen yhtenäisenä huolimatta Saksan osavaltioiden koulupoliittisesta itsehallinnosta.</p> <p>Merkittävää on lehden PISA-keskustelusta puuttuva kunkin maan ja koulutusjärjestelmän kontekstin punnitseminen. Toimijat tulkitsivat PISA:ssa sijoittumista varsin kriittikittömästi joko menestyneen tai epäonnistuneen koulutuspolitiikan indikaattorina. PISA:n merkitys argumenteille myös vaihteli, vaikka muiden maiden menestystekijöitä tarkasteltiin nimenomaan PISA:aan liittyvänä keskusteluna. Mielenkiintoista on se, että vaikka globalisaation ja markkinaperiaatteiden ulottuminen julkiseen koulujärjestelmään nähtiin uhkana, samassa yhteydessä ei keskusteltu PISA:n ja sen käsitteistön leviämisestä kansallisiin koulutusjärjestelmiin. Saksalaisen Bildung-tradition ja PISA:n edustaman koulutusymmärryksen yhteensopivuutta ei myöskään kyseenalaistettu. PISA-tutkimukseen suhtauduttiin siis ylhäältä annettuna auktoriteettina, johon viittaamalla perusteltiin väitteitä tieteellisyysnimitys vastakohtana esimerkiksi poliitikkojen väitettyihin ideologisiin käsityksiin. Tulokset havainnollistavat, kuinka PISA:n kaltainen työkalu voidaan valjastaa poliittisen argumentoinnin apuvälineeksi vetoamalla tieteellisen tutkimuksen todistusvoimaan.</p> <p>GEW:in PISA-keskustelu vahvistaa aiemman tutkimuksen huomioita PISA:aan nojaavan koulutuspoliittisen argumentaation haastavuudesta. Toimijoiden argumentaatio oli osin epä johdonmukaista. Toisaalta lehdessä oli esillä ristiriitaisia väitteitä siitä, miten PISA-tuloksia pitäisi hyödyntää konkreettisesti koulunkäynnin ja oppimisen parantamiseksi. Ristiriidoista ei kuitenkaan juuri keskusteltu. Samanaikaisesti useat koulutuspoliittiset ongelmanmäärittelyt päättyivät ehdottomiin vastakkainasetteluihin esittäessään, että PISA:sta voitaisiin tehdä joko oikeita tai vääriä johtopäätöksiä. Silti ei lopulta ollut selvää, mitä PISA:n perusteella oli toimijoiden mukaan mahdollista sanoa. Tämä ei kuitenkaan heikentänyt PISA:lle epäsuorasti myönnettyä valta-asemaa. Tulokset vahvistavat aiemman tutkimuksen osoittamaa tarvetta huomioida laajamittaisten osaamisvertailujen vaikutusta koulutusdiskursseihin ja uskomuksiin.</p>		
Avainsanat – Nyckelord – Keywords <p>PISA-tutkimus Saksa opettajat problematisoinnit koulutuspolitiikka koulutusjärjestelmät</p>		

1 Introduction

Since its first cycle of assessing the student achievement in 2000, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) conducted by the Organisation of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has attracted exceptional attention throughout the educational world. Conducted every three years, PISA measures the competence of 15-year-olds in mathematics, natural science and reading literacy.

Germany in particular reacted intensively to the PISA results, in which it ranked notably below the OECD average in all three subjects out of the 32 countries that participated in 2000. Additionally, Germany had one of the strongest correlations between socioeconomic background and achievement. The media coverage and public discussion of PISA in Germany extended that of any other participating country, so that German PISA reactions have been characterised as a “shock”.¹ The media reported a “PISA fiasco” and an “educational catastrophe” and for example *Der Spiegel* asked on its cover, whether German pupils were “stupid”.² The Standing Conference of *Länder* Ministers for Culture and Education in Germany (*Kultusministerkonferenz*, KMK) called an emergency meeting and announced a list of measures as a reaction to PISA.³ Observers have stated that PISA did not only cause a discursive shift in Germany but also changed the way German educational politics were arranged.⁴ In this master’s thesis I examine the German PISA shock from the perspective of German teachers.

¹ Niemann, Dennis (2010) Deutschland – Im Zentrum des PISA-Sturms. In Knodel, Philipp, Martens, Kerstin, de Olano, Daniel & Popp, Marie (eds.) *Das PISA-Echo: Internationale*

² Sind deutsche Schüler doof? Magazine cover. *Der Spiegel* 50/2001, 10 December 2001. <http://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-20960854.html>. Accessed 20 February 2018; Darnstädt, Thomas, Koch, Julia, Mohr, Joachim, Neumann, Conny, Wensierski, Peter (2001) PISA-Fiasko: Das Land der Dichter und Denker – abgehängt. *Spiegel Online*, 14 December 2001. <http://www.spiegel.de/lebenundlernen/schule/pisa-fiasko-das-land-der-dichter-und-denker-abgehaengt-a-172574.html>. Accessed 20 February 2018.

³ Kultusministerkonferenz (KMK) (2002) PISA 2000 – Zentrale Handlungsfelder. Zusammenfassende Darstellung der laufenden und geplanten Maßnahmen in den Ländern. Beschluss der 299. Kultusministerkonferenz vom 17./18.10.2002. http://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/2002/2002_10_07-Pisa-2000-Zentrale-Handlungsfelder.pdf. Accessed 30 March 2018; Niemann, 72.

⁴ Ertl, Hubert (2006) Educational standards and the changing discourse on education: the reception and consequences of the PISA study in Germany. *Oxford Review of Education*, 32(5), 619–634; Niemann, 59–60.

1.1 Research task

Among the countless contributions to the German PISA reactions, this thesis focuses on the historical event of the German PISA shock with a case study of teachers' perspective on PISA. Despite the cornucopia of literature on the German PISA case, teachers' point of view on the issue has not attracted much inquiry in Germany. Teachers are the actors facing the reality and consequences of educational policymaking in their everyday professional life, yet from their position they have no direct influence on politics. Still, or perhaps consequently, research concerning the influence of large-scale assessments in Germany has mainly concentrated on examining the effect on policy and media.⁵

I have selected the largest teachers' union in Germany, *Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft* (GEW) as the case group of educational workers. I will analyse their direct interpretations of PISA by looking at the PISA discussions and discourses in the membership magazine of the organisation, *Erziehung und Wissenschaft* (E&W) directly after the publication of the results in December 2001. Investigating the roles attributed to PISA within a small group provides insights into the extent of its ascendancy as a transnational policy instrument at national level debates. While analysing how the actors commented the PISA situation, this thesis presumes that they simultaneously interpreted and gave meanings to the whole institution of PISA.

The OECD launched PISA for the very purpose of assisting governments and the public to monitor and improve their national school systems with comparable data on educational outcomes between participant countries. Unlike earlier large-scale studies, PISA was not designed to measure the mastery of curricular contents of each country; instead, it was intended to assess the ability of young people at the end of compulsory schooling age to apply what they had learnt in "real life situations". The intention of such a large-scale assessment was therefore based on the argument that, PISA would

⁵ E.g. Martens, Kerstin & Niemann, Dennis (2013) When Do Numbers Count? The Differential Impact of the PISA Rating and Ranking on Education Policy in Germany and the US. *German Politics*, 22(3), 314–332; Tillmann, Klaus-Jürgen, Dederich, Kathrin, Kneuper, Daniel, Kuhlmann, Christian & Nessel, Isa (2008) PISA als bildungspolitisches Ereignis: Fallstudien in vier Bundesländern. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften; Ringarp, Johanna (2016) PISA lends legitimacy: A study of education policy changes in Germany and Sweden after 2000. *European Educational Research Journal*, 15(4) 447–461.

provide evidence on how well national educational systems prepared students to meet the needs of the 21st century economic realities.⁶ In times of a dominant knowledge economy discourse⁷, which promotes the belief in the linkage of educational achievement and economic growth, such an assertion is likely to receive acceptance and increase the interest in achievement assessments. However, Phillip Brown and Hugh Lauder among others have questioned the common assumptions that demand for technical skills would be increasing in the future and that higher skill levels would result in high returns.⁸

Meanwhile, the significance that international organisations such as the OECD have gained in defining educational goals through large-scale assessments has drawn educational researchers and social scientists to scrutinise these new processes of global educational governance. The widespread acceptance of the PISA studies by governments and educationists worldwide has increased critical analyses on its impact on national policymaking and educational discourse.⁹ In 2014, academics from the field of education sent an open letter to the OECD's PISA Director Andreas Schleicher, expressing concerns that PISA would have a negative influence on national educational systems and that it would narrow the understanding of education.¹⁰

In the German public discussion other national models of education and international comparison played an essential role as well.¹¹ Kerstin Martens and Dennis Niemann among others have explained the particular intensity of the German response to PISA by stating that Germans were under the historical impression of being educationally

⁶ OECD (2000) Measuring student knowledge and skills: The PISA 2000 Assessment of Reading, Mathematical and Scientific Literacy. Paris: OECD, 3–4, 7–8.

⁷ See Bacchi, Carol (2009) Analysing Policy: What is the problem represented to be? French Forest, N.S.W.: Pearson, 232–242.

⁸ Brown, Phillip & Lauder, Hugh (2012) Globalization, knowledge, and the myth of the magnet economy. In Livingstone, D. W. & Guile, David (eds.) The Knowledge Economy and Lifelong Learning. A Critical Reader. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 117–146.

⁹ Sellar, Sam & Lingard, Bob (2014) The OECD and the expansion of PISA: new global modes of governance in education. *British Educational Research Journal*, 40(6), 917–936; Grek, Sotiria (2009) Governing by numbers: the PISA 'effect' in Europe. *Journal of Education Policy*, 24(1), 23–37; Auld, Euan & Morris, Paul (2016) PISA, policy and persuasion: translating complex conditions into education 'best practice'. *Comparative Education*, 52(2), 202–229.

¹⁰ See the debate between the critics and Schleicher in *Policy Futures in Education* (2014), 12(7).

¹¹ E.g. Ringarp.

superior and thereby taken aback because of the poor ranking.¹² Germany has historically had a culturally specific self-perception of *Bildung*, which cannot be translated as mere ‘education’¹³; this aspect brought an additional starting tone to the German PISA discussion.¹⁴ Researchers have demonstrated that merely low national scores in PISA have not necessarily led to an intensive consideration of the assessment. Instead, local contextual factors can better explain the character of the national response.¹⁵

Teachers’ discussion concerns a variety of societal flows; thus their contribution to the debate did not take place in a vacuum. Moreover, the PISA discussion fundamentally involved a research perspective, as the objective of PISA is directed at the aim of evidence-based policymaking; that is, the utilisation of scientific knowledge to inform policymakers.¹⁶ Bellmann has discussed the German PISA debate drawing attention to the power relations between researcher knowledge, political decisionmaking and educational theory. He claims that while there is an “alliance” between contemporary research and educational politics, the PISA discussion has shown that the relation between politics and research is not quite clear, as there is no consensus on what conclusions should in fact be drawn from the PISA results.¹⁷ Consequently, the German researcher discussion following the release of PISA 2000 results cannot be overlooked when attempting to understand teachers’ interpretations of the German PISA debate. The researcher discussion therefore plays an essential role in the analysis chapters, where the analysed GEW material is contrasted with contemporary researchers’ positions on PISA.

¹² Martens & Niemann, 315, 324; Gruber, 201–202.

¹³ It is difficult to find one word to describe the connotations attached to *Bildung*. Cultivation and self-formation are just one aspects to mention. See e.g. Masschelein, Jan & Ricken, Norbert (2003) Do We (Still) Need the Concept of Bildung? *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 35(2), 139–154.

¹⁴ See Horlacher, Rebekka (2011) *Bildung*. Bern: Haupt Verlag.

¹⁵ Wiseman, Alexander (2013) Policy responses to PISA in comparative perspective. In Meyer, Heinz-Dieter & Benavot, Aaron (eds.) *PISA, Power, and Policy: the emergence of global educational governance*. Oxford: Symposium Books, 303–322; Martens & Niemann.

¹⁶ Wiseman, Alexander W. (2010) The Uses of Evidence for Educational Policymaking: Global Contexts and International Trends. *Review of Research in Education*, 34(1), 1–24.

¹⁷ Bellmann, Johannes (2007) Der Pragmatismus als Philosophie von PISA? *Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft*, 10(3), 421–437.

In order to understand German educational politics, certain characteristics of the system must be taken into account. Firstly, owing to the federal structure of the country, each of the 16 *Bundesländer* has relatively strong autonomy over its own school system. The ministers of education in each *Bundesland* exert power through KMK, the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education in Germany (*Kultusministerkonferenz*), whereas the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (BMBF) has a more subordinate role.¹⁸ Secondly, the German school system differs from most other Western systems due to its tripartite structure, where children are allocated at around the age of 11 to separate secondary schools. *Gymnasium* is the highest of three hierarchical school forms offering an academic track, whereas *Realschule*, an intermediate track, and *Hauptschule* as the lowest one prepare the youth for vocational education. Additionally, there exist special schools, *Sonderschulen*, for children with disabilities. Most *Bundesländer* also have *Gesamtschulen* alongside the selective schools; in these ‘comprehensive’ schools different school types are combined in a single school building, yet this does not mean that children would always be instructed in mixed-ability groups.¹⁹ The federal structure and the tracking element of the system are therefore essential aspects to pay attention to when analysing the research material.

I will look back to the beginning of the German PISA discussion in order to trace the initial interpretations and experience of a group that was not under the pressure of implementing policies as the German politicians were. Nevertheless, the GEW as an active player in the German educational debates was intrinsically linked to the political context²⁰. In fact, according to Klaus-Jürgen Tillmann et al., PISA provided arguments for teachers’ unions to criticise those in power.²¹ Given the attention to educational inequality that PISA caused in German education debates²², the viewpoint of the GEW is especially interesting because of the strong emphasis they give to social equality issues in education²³. One of the questions of this thesis is therefore, how the social

¹⁸ Ertl, 622; Niemann, 61.

¹⁹ Niemann, 62; Ertl 620, 631; Pfahl, Lisa & Powell, Justin J.W. (2011) Legitimizing school segregation. The special education profession and the discourse of learning disability in Germany. *Disability & Society*, 26(4), 449–462.

²⁰ Hartong, Sigrid (2011) *Basiskompetenzen statt Bildung? Wie PISA die deutschen Schulen verändert hat*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 208.

²¹ Tillmann et al., 42–45.

²² See e.g. Ertl.

²³ GEW (no date) Die GEW stellt sich vor. <http://www.gew.de/ueber-uns>. Accessed 24 January 2018.

equality aspect relates to the market economy approach to education of the OECD.²⁴ Johannes Bellmann has suggested that, the OECD's educational thinking, which he claims consists of both the human capital theory and social constructionism, is paradoxical and has misled the interpretations of the background of PISA.²⁵ Consequently, the extent to which the GEW teachers accepted PISA as an institution is the main interest of this thesis. By focusing on the early stage of the PISA discussion I attempt to trace the first impressions and reactions of the GEW members in order to better understand the roles that were attached to PISA in a single national context.

In the following parts of chapter one I describe the approach of this thesis by presenting previous literature and the theoretical and methodological framework. Next, I present and discuss the research material. I conclude chapter one by presenting the outline of this work and the questions that I will apply to the GEW material. In chapters two, three and four the research material of the GEW magazine is analysed. The argumentation of the GEW material is put into perspective by reflecting it with the contemporary researcher discussion particularly in chapter four. Finally, I will discuss the findings in chapter five.

1.2 Previous research

This thesis does not concern what PISA does or its actual policy impact. This is already a subject of a remarkable amount of research, both in the German context and internationally.²⁶ Instead, this thesis will address the discourses surrounding PISA that reproduce its ascendancy: how PISA was discussed and what kind of roles the selected actors attached to it in a national context. It is therefore necessary to examine the

²⁴ On the market economy approach of the OECD, see e.g. Bieber, Tonia & Martens, Kerstin (2011) The OECD PISA Study as a Soft Power in Education? Lessons from Switzerland and the US. *European Journal of Education*, 46(1), 101–116; Simola, Hannu, Rinne, Risto, Varjo, Janne & Kauko, Jaakko (2013) The paradox of the education race: how to win the ranking game by sailing to headwind. *Journal of Education Policy*, 28(5), 612–633.

²⁵ Bellmann 2007.

²⁶ E.g. Knodel, Philipp, Martens, Kerstin, de Olano, Daniel & Popp, Marie (2010, eds.) Das PISA-Echo: Internationale Reaktionen auf die Bildungsstudie. Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag; Breakspear, Simon (2012) The Policy Impact of PISA: An Exploration of the Normative Effects of International Benchmarking in School System Performance. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 71. Paris: OECD; Ringarp.

historical and transnational perspective on the influence of international agencies on national educational discourses.

PISA in the international context

At the turn of the 21st century, the influence of globalisation on national educational processes had already attracted attention among researchers, who remarked on the increasing standardisation of educational models and the growing role of supranational actors since World War II.²⁷ Stephen J. Ball drew attention to the diffusion of ideas such as the ‘knowledge-based economy’ and the emergence of “magical solutions” to educational and societal ‘problems’, and suggested that the global developments were leading towards an increasing commodification of education.²⁸

Although governments have gazed into other national educational systems since the beginning of the building of nation-states, many researchers have stated that towards the end of the 20th century the influence of international actors on national educational politics has increased and the nature of comparison changed. Educational outcomes are in public and among politicians expected to produce economic success, and the belief in fast solutions for more effective and accountable educational systems has gained ground.²⁹ António Nóvoa and Tali Yariv-Mashal remarked the growing popularity of comparative educational research and its use as a political tool “rather than a research method or an intellectual inquiry”.³⁰ In other words, what was referred to as ‘educational research’ seemed to have gained differential meanings. The need to make education scientific by collecting hard data has, according to critics, led to ignoring the

²⁷ Dale, Roger (2003) Globalization: A New World for Comparative Education? In Schriewer, Jürgen (ed.) *Discourse Formation in Comparative Education*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2nd ed., 87–109.

²⁸ Ball, Stephen J. (1998) Big Policies/Small World: An Introduction to International Perspectives in Education Policy. *Comparative Education*, 34(2), 119–130.

²⁹ Rust, Val D. (2006) Foreign influences in educational reform. In Ertl, Hubert (ed.) *Cross-national attraction in education: accounts from England and Germany*. Oxford: Symposium Books, 23–33; Kamens, David H. (2013) Globalization and the Emergence of an Audit Culture: PISA and the search for ‘best practices’ and magic bullets. In Meyer, Heinz-Dieter & Benavot, Aaron (eds.) *PISA, Power, and Policy: the emergence of global educational governance*. Oxford: Symposium Books, 117–139.

³⁰ Nóvoa, António & Yariv-Mashal, Tali (2003) Comparative research in education: a mode of governance or a historical journey? *Comparative Education*, 39(4), 423.

contextual variance and complexities of educational phenomena – aspects that others in the field considered crucial.³¹

Moreover, researchers have stated that the ostensibly context-free approach may easily lead to reiterating certain policy discourses, recently referring to *efficiency*, *accountability* and *quality* in education, by claiming them to be universal goals, even though they in fact would aim at national success in global competition.³² Roger Dale has commented that while national educational systems should be seen as products of a world culture, supranational forces affecting national educational systems ought to be also interpreted “through national institutions and traditions”³³. In fact, Kerstin Martens, Klaus Wolf and Daniel Tröhler have drawn attention to the national interests behind the PISA organisation that trace back to the Cold War power structure.³⁴ On the other hand, Hannu Simola et al. have pointed out how the “unbearable narrowness of a national view” may also lead to blindness when observing how transnational comparison affects the national and the local.³⁵ These approaches have prominently guided my topic of research to scrutinising the complex relations between what is understood as national and international.

One should therefore consider PISA as only one instrument in this larger context of globalisation of educational discourse. The wide-reaching acceptance of PISA since its launch in 1999 has reinforced the significance of the OECD within the educational world.³⁶ This has prompted increasing critical analyses of the reception of PISA in

³¹ Cowen, Robert (2014) Ways of knowing, outcomes and ‘comparative education’: be careful what you pray for. *Comparative Education*, 50(3), 282–301; Simola, Hannu, Rinne, Risto, Varjo, Janne & Kauko, Jaakko (2013) The paradox of the education race: how to win the ranking game by sailing to headwind. *Journal of Education Policy*, 28(5), 612–633.

³² Simola, Hannu & Rinne, Risto (2011) Education Politics and Contingency. In Pereyra, Miguel A., Kotthoff, Hans-Georg & Cowen, Robert (eds.) *PISA Under Examination: Changing Knowledge, Changing Tests, and Changing Schools*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 226; Kettunen, Pauli (2008) Globalisaatio ja kansallinen me: kansallisen katseen historiallinen kritiikki. Tampere: Vastapaino.

³³ Dale 2003, 88–89.

³⁴ Martens, Kerstin & Wolf, Klaus D. (2006) Paradoxien der Neuen Staatsräson: Die Internationalisierung der Bildungspolitik in der EU und der OECD. *Zeitschrift für Internationale Beziehungen*, 13(2), 145–176; Tröhler, Daniel (2013) The OECD and Cold War Culture: thinking historically about PISA. In Meyer, Heinz-Dieter & Benavot, Aaron (eds.) *PISA, Power, and Policy: the emergence of global educational governance*. Oxford: Symposium Books, 141–161.

³⁵ Simola et al. 2013, 613; Kettunen, 2008.

³⁶ Sellar & Lingard 2014.

various national contexts.³⁷ Many critical educational scientists question its performative influence and contribution to the ascendancy of standardisation and rankings.³⁸

A global pressure of certain politics has created an educational discourse that reinforces policy isomorphism and increasing convergence in educational systems.³⁹ Although John W. Meyer and others have identified convergence of educational systems as a natural development,⁴⁰ critics point out how international agencies promote certain policy themes. Besides standardisation and accountability, concepts such as *decentralisation*, *school autonomy* and *privatisation* increasingly appear in the vocabulary of educational policymaking across nations. What is often underlined within this discourse, is the goal of both equity and excellence: the comparativists are commonly driven by the ideal of decreasing educational inequality, although critical sociologists such as Nelly Stromquist have stated that in reality, the competitive liberal capitalist model seems to gain grounds.⁴¹ Jenny Ozga has suggested that the increasing emphasis on educational accountability has in fact led to a decline in political and professional accountability, whereas a neoliberal, technical understanding of accountability has taken root.⁴² Critical analyses of national PISA reception have also remarked that the actual OECD recommendations, for example improving equality issues, often do not appear in the national reforms: it is more the legitimacy of PISA-inspired reforms that drives political forces. Thus, often the politicians seem only to

³⁷ Pereyra, Miguel A., Kotthoff, Hans-Georg & Cowen, Robert (2011, eds.) *PISA Under Examination: Changing Knowledge, Changing Tests, and Changing Schools*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers; see also Ozga, Jenny (2012) Assessing PISA. *European Educational Research Journal*, 11(2), 166–171.

³⁸ Grek 2009; Meyer, Heinz-Dieter & Benavot, Aaron (2013, eds.) *PISA, Power, and Policy: the emergence of global educational governance*. Oxford: Symposium Books; Gorur, Radhika (2016) Seeing like PISA: A cautionary tale about the performativity of international assessments. *European Educational Research Journal*, 15(5), 598–616.

³⁹ Wiseman, Alexander W., Pilton, James & Lowe, J. Courtney (2010) International Educational Governance Models and National Policy Convergence. In Amos, S. Karin (ed.) *International Educational Governance. International Perspectives on Education and Society*, vol. 12. Bingley: Emerald Group Publishing Ltd, 3–18.

⁴⁰ Meyer, John W. & Ramirez, Francisco O. (2000) The World Institutionalization of Education. In Schriewer, Jürgen (ed.) *Discourse Formation in Comparative Education*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2nd ed., 111–132.

⁴¹ Stromquist, Nelly P. (2005) Comparative and International Education: A Journey toward Equality and Equity. *Harvard Educational Review*, 75(1), 101–107; Bieber & Martens.

⁴² Ozga, Jenny (2013) Accountability as a policy technology: accounting for education performance in Europe. *International Review of Administrative Sciences*, 79(2) 292–309.

make use of the ranking rather than actually take interest in the PISA data.⁴³ My research setting also pays attention to how teachers responded to these issues.

As mentioned before, these developments are tightly connected to the contemporary tendency to connect educational achievement with economic success.⁴⁴ For the OECD, emphasising the capability of the PISA scores to predict national economic performance is a fundamental part of its logic and argumentation.⁴⁵ However, David Berliner and Alexander Wiseman among others have criticised the increasing tendency of contemporary educational discourse to draw causal connections between assessment results and economic growth.⁴⁶

Wiseman et al. see the economisation of education as part of a more general transnational scientized discourse, a growing conviction since World War II that societal problems could be solved by rationalizing the social world.⁴⁷ The appeal of the collection of data and comparisons is tightly connected to this kind of rationale, aiming at “evidence-based” policymaking and identifying “best practices”, which would result in desired educational outcomes.⁴⁸ Simola has described the discourse praising the effectivity of educational reform as “wishful rationalism”, a truth discourse, which becomes self-evident and affects what is seen as essential concerning educational reform.⁴⁹ Radhika Gorur has argued that in contemporary times of economic and political uncertainty, a narrative of crisis with “proven” solutions is likely to appear

⁴³ Sellar, Sam & Lingard, Bob (2013) Looking East: Shanghai, PISA 2009 and the reconstitution of reference societies in the global education policy field. *Comparative Education*, 49(4), 464–485; Choi, Álvaro & Jerrim, John (2016) The use (and misuse) of PISA in guiding policy reform: the case of Spain. *Comparative Education*, 52(2), 230–245.

⁴⁴ Sellar & Lingard 2013; Bieber & Martens.

⁴⁵ E.g. OECD (2010) The high cost of low educational performance. The long-run economic impact of improving PISA outcomes. Paris: OECD Publishing; see also Hanushek, Eric & Wößmann, Ludger (2010) The economics of international differences in educational achievement. CESinfo Working Paper, No. 3037.

⁴⁶ E.g. Berliner, David (2015) The Many Facets of PISA. *Teachers College Record*, 117(1), 1–20; Wiseman 2010, 11.

⁴⁷ Wiseman, Alexander W., Damaschke-Deitrick, Lisa, Bruce, Elizabeth, Davidson, Petrina & Taylor, Calley Stevens (2014) Transnational scientized education discourse: A cross-national comparison. In Schmid, Josef, Amos, Karin, Schrader, Josef & Thiel, Ansgar (eds.) *Internationalisierte Welten der Bildung und Bildungspolitik im globalen Vergleich*. Baden-Baden: Nomos, 121–146.

⁴⁸ Wiseman 2010.

⁴⁹ Simola, Hannu (1998) Firmly bolted into the air: Wishful rationalism as a discursive basis for educational reforms. *Teachers College Record*, 99(4), 731–757.

attractive.⁵⁰ Simola et al. and Ozga have referred to the OECD as a leading force of a neoliberal movement, which reinforces “ideologies of technocratic rationality”.⁵¹ Furthermore, it has been noted that reporting the evidence-based method does not always mean that it would be the actual method used for political decisions, it is rather the legitimacy that quantitative data enjoys that persuades governing agents to make all educational policy “evidence-based”.⁵²

Robert Cowen has referred to an “agency voice”, which promotes the message that through instruments provided by international organisations such as the OECD, correct solutions to educational ‘problems’ could be identified. Another problematic point according to Cowen is the “manifestly objective” tone of this kind of comparative research, when it presents certain policy reforms as global ‘imperatives’ or “universal remedies”. Despite the alleged objectivity, this kind of discourse is in fact increasingly political and connected to national and transnational politics.⁵³ Euan Auld and Paul Morris have problematised the “crisis rhetoric” of the OECD and consultant agencies such as McKinsey as a “story of control”, which these agencies use to legitimate their approach to education as the “only reasonable position”.⁵⁴

Depoliticising the matter in fact makes it easier to offer policy recommendations as “neutral”, which reinforces the implicit power of single actors in international organisations.⁵⁵ Researchers have referred to the OECD as a “soft power” in the educational world, in order to explain the ascendancy of an organisation, which in fact has no legal power over education.⁵⁶ One could look at the alleged objectivity of the agency voice of the OECD and the evidence-based policy discourse through what Jürgen Habermas and Max Horkheimer stated about scientism, namely that it “silences an important debate about values, informed opinion, moral judgements and beliefs”.⁵⁷ Therefore, particularly the definition processes of these alleged ‘problems’ and

⁵⁰ Gorur.

⁵¹ Simola et al. 2013, 613; Ozga 2013.

⁵² Wiseman 2010.

⁵³ Cowen; Grek 2009.

⁵⁴ Auld & Morris; see also Gorur.

⁵⁵ Grek, Sotiria (2013) Expert moves: international comparative testing and the rise of expertocracy. *Journal of Education Policy*, 28(5), 695–709.

⁵⁶ Wiseman 2010, 17; Bieber & Martens.

⁵⁷ Habermas 1972, Horkheimer 1972, cited in Manion, Lawrence, Cohen, Louis, Morrison, Keith (2013) *Research Methods in Education*. Abingdon: Routledge, 15.

ostensibly neutral ‘best practices’ remain interesting for research.

In consequence, instead of expecting that countries or actors within them react similarly, it is relevant to ask *how* interpretations are formed and how they function in national contexts. Previous accounts have pointed out that merely poor PISA results were not causing strong reactions at a national level⁵⁸. Building on this, I focus on the processes in which the situation is defined problematic, attempting towards a better understanding of the mechanisms of political influence at the grassroots level. After all, reactions to PISA, although diverging in form, have shown a tendency of what Luís Miguel Carvalho has called “convergence towards the tool”, referring to the constitution of PISA as a taken-for-granted platform, where interests and meanings are reproduced. Carvalho notes that the “existence of PISA depends on the effective connection of interested (individual and collective) actors”.⁵⁹ It is therefore not irrelevant to consider, who talks about PISA and how.

PISA in the German context

Previous research on the PISA reception in Germany has highlighted that PISA caused a tremendous shift in the educational discourse, which led to a fast establishment of a new culture of comparison and determined the discussion in educational politics long after the release of the results.⁶⁰ Tillmann et al. have conducted an exhaustive analysis on the politics of the German PISA discussion from the politicians’ perspective and concluded that PISA served mostly as a form of legitimation for already existing political agendas.⁶¹ As stated before, finding such a function for PISA is not unusual in the critical educational scientists’ approaches to PISA.⁶²

⁵⁸ Martens & Niemann; Wiseman 2013.

⁵⁹ Carvalho, Luís Miguel (2012) The Fabrications and Travels of a Knowledge-Policy Instrument. *European Educational Research Journal*, 11(2), 183–184.

⁶⁰ Ertl; Niemann; Martens & Niemann.

⁶¹ Tillmann, Klaus-Jürgen, Dederig, Kathrin, Kneuper, Daniel, Kuhlmann, Christian & Nessel, Isa (2008) PISA als bildungspolitisches Ereignis: Fallstudien in vier Bundesländern. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.

⁶² See e.g. Takayama, K., Waldow, F., Sung, Y.-K. (2013) Finland has it all? Examining the media accentuation of Finnish education in Australia, Germany and South Korea. *Research in Comparative and International Education*, 8(3), 307–325; Grek 2009.

The impact of PISA in Germany on policy and media has thus been a subject to multiple analyses,⁶³ but from rather different perspectives than this thesis. Johanna Ringarp has looked at the German case from the conceptual perspective of reference societies and legitimacy, but focusing on policy level and examining the main actor of German educational politics, the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Education in Germany (*Kultusministerkonferenz*, KMK)⁶⁴. Many accounts on the German PISA case, despite discussing the impact of PISA on policy and discourses, tend to neglect the larger context of the PISA institution and the implicit political influence of the institution⁶⁵. Others, such as Margarete Imhof's study of German teachers' reception of PISA, begin with the presumption that PISA ought to be used to improve teachers' working methods⁶⁶. Sotiria Grek, however, has pointed out the overarching acceptance of PISA in German political and public discourse among other countries; additionally, Martens and Niemann place the paradigm shift particularly in the context of global governance OECD and the promotion of PISA⁶⁷. While these studies have mostly focused on policy and media, they provide a helpful framework for a case study of a specific group such as the GEW.

This master's thesis is an attempt to examine to what extent the "PISA effect"⁶⁸ takes root at a level closer to the field of educational professionals. Thus, my research interest does not merely lie at how PISA results were interpreted and evaluated, but also at how the actors related to the institution itself and its background. Analysing how individuals and groups outside the initial policy making circle became engaged and made conclusions of the situation provides a different vantage point to the extent of the authority of PISA. Therefore, the interest of this thesis leans on not only the interpretations of PISA, but on how the actors by interpreting the PISA results also

⁶³ See Hopfenbeck, Therese N., Lenkeit, Jenny, El Masri, Yasmine, Cantrell, Kate, Ryan, Jeanne & Baird, Jo-Anne (2017) Lessons Learned from PISA: A Systematic Review of Peer-Reviewed Articles on the Programme for International Student Assessment. *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research*, 61(1), 13–14.

⁶⁴ Ringarp.

⁶⁵ E.g. Gruber; Ertl.

⁶⁶ Imhof, Margarete (2005) Zur Rezeption der Ergebnisse der PISA-Studie durch Lehrer und Lehrerinnen: Meinungen und Einstellungen. *Unterrichtswissenschaft*, 33(3), 255–271. It must be noted that although Imhof's study could at a first glance seem relevant for my thesis as it also concerns German teachers' perception, it derives from the field of pedagogical psychology and has therefore a very different research approach.

⁶⁷ Grek 2009; Martens & Niemann, 325.

⁶⁸ Grek 2009.

interpreted the institution itself. In regard to my research interest in the GEW agents' experience, I have additionally examined the context in which they participated in the PISA debate, that is, the German researchers discussion, in order to place the GEW reactions in their contextual relationships. This is to show that different actors did not necessarily relate in a similar way to PISA, some might have questioned the institution more than others.

Florian Waldow has touched upon the GEW's reactions to other national models in the case of Finland as a reference society and thereby provided not only substantial but also methodological support for my approach. However, his research focus, time frame and sources differed from the research settings of this thesis.⁶⁹ Jesco Kreft has examined the GEW positions on PISA as part of his study of German labour unions as actors in educational politics. According to Kreft, after the release of PISA a change had occurred in the GEW attitudes to international large-scale assessments. Whereas the GEW had still questioned the methodology and validity of earlier studies, in its position to PISA it increasingly accepted the orientation of large-scale studies and supported a thorough educational reform.⁷⁰

Sigrid Hartong has additionally noted, that the GEW's criticism was not directed at the OECD or at PISA, but at the German implementation of the results. The GEW criticised mainly the mentality of exclusion, which according to the GEW prevailed in the conservative groups of the German society.⁷¹ Although the findings of Kreft and Hartong give an indication of the direction of what to expect from my research material, it must be noted that their time scopes and approaches differed from my research interest in the claims of the agents and evaluation of the institution. I will elucidate these aspects of the approach in the next subchapter.

A perspective closer to my viewpoint can be found in Tillmann et al.'s extensive study, where they show how PISA results were utilised in political processes in four German

⁶⁹ Waldow, Florian (2010a) Der Traum von "skandinavisch schlau werden". *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, 56(4), 497–511.

⁷⁰ Kreft, Jesco (2006) Gewerkschaften und Spitzenverbände der Wirtschaft als bildungspolitische Akteure. Positionen, Strategien und Allianzen. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 167; Hartong, 208–209.

⁷¹ Hartong, 210.

states. Their work has elucidated how the legitimacy of PISA functioned at a political level: what mattered was the public and political acceptance of PISA rather than any “empirically proven” results. For instance introducing national standards and all-day schooling were legitimated as consequences of PISA although they had been on the agenda already before the publication of the assessment.⁷²

However, Tillmann et al. did not link their findings to the larger transnational phenomenon of the impact of large-scale assessments on national educational policy and discourse. Waldow has criticised Tillmann et al. of this lack of connections to international comparative literature, calling the German case “a textbook example of the selective use of international in the national policy-making process”.⁷³ This thesis builds on Waldow’s remarks on the Tillmann et al. study by choosing the approach from the presented international literature. Elsewhere, Dale has examined the education policy formation at the EU level and suggested, leaning on Cox (1996), that most work on the topic lacks a critical approach, falling to the category of “problem-solving theory”, which takes institutions and social power relations for granted⁷⁴. My approach starts from a similar endeavour to look at the German case from a critical perspective giving particular attention to the position of the OECD and PISA as institutions in the teachers’ discourses. I will analyse a narrow selection of sources with a more thorough lense, which takes into account the extent of which national models and international influence are taken for granted.

1.3 Theoretical and methodological framework

I have defined as my research task to analyse how German teachers within the union GEW interpreted the PISA 2000 results. I will approach this task from two angles: the experience and expectations of the GEW and their way of constructing and representing problems.

⁷² Tillmann et al.

⁷³ Waldow, Florian (2010b) What PISA did and did not do: Germany after the “PISA-shock”. *European Educational Research Journal*, 8(3), 482.

⁷⁴ Dale, Roger (2009) Contexts, Constraints and Resources in the Development of European Education Space and European Education Policy. In Dale, Roger & Robertson, Susan (eds.) *Globalisation & Europeanisation in Education*. Oxford: Symposium Books, 24.

Space of experience and horizon of expectation

Firstly, in accordance with the history of ideas, instead of focusing at the conditions itself, this thesis looks at how actors of the time experienced and defined the situation. The task is, as Markku Hyrkkänen puts it, to “conceive the conceiving of things”.⁷⁵ In order to understand the problematisations of the past individuals, one can lean on what Reinhart Koselleck theorised as “the future of the past” (*Vergangene Zukunft*). With that he meant examining how people in the past conceived and made choices concerning their future.⁷⁶ Consequently, the actors’ present experience is to some extent determined by their past, and, it is their past in their present experience that guides how they conceptualise the future: it guides the histories that they can imagine possible (*mögliche Geschichten*). Experience, as Koselleck formulates, has processed past occurrence; it can make the past present and thus bind together fulfilled or missed possibilities within one’s own behaviour. Koselleck defined the categories of “space of experience” and “horizon of expectation” as tools to better understand the complex connections of past, present and future in the action of past agents. With ‘horizon’ Koselleck demonstrates the difference of expectations compared to the already experienced — the horizon is a line visible in front of us, but in the end impossible to reach.⁷⁷

Koselleck suggests, that these categories are suitable for the thematisation of historical time because they in a sense embody past and future. One thing that history of ideas can teach is to refine the human ability of placing oneself into other people’s position⁷⁸. The point of acknowledging these categories from Koselleck as the embodiment of historical time in this work is to stay receptive to how meanings are constructed in the research material: to what extent and ways the past has a role in the descriptions of the present, and how expectations of the future are shaped by what is experienced in the past, and on the other hand, how expectations may shape the present.⁷⁹

Furthermore, Koselleck’s concepts guide to being receptive of the fears, hopes, and desires, as well as the rational thinking and the curiosity inherent in the representations

⁷⁵ Hyrkkänen, Markku (2002) Aatehistorian mieli. Tampere: Vastapaino, 41–42.

⁷⁶ Koselleck, Reinhard (1989) *Vergangene Zukunft. Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp; Hyrkkänen, 246.

⁷⁷ Koselleck, 350–357.

⁷⁸ Hyrkkänen, 247.

⁷⁹ See Koselleck, 353–359.

of problems, which are entangled in the present, the past and the future. Accordingly, Koselleck justified the purpose of these concepts in their ability to guide the focus on the “concrete units of action” within social or political movement.⁸⁰ Precisely the concept of agency within the GEW connects to the core of my research focus — agency within the GEW actors as educational agents but also as political actors participating in the political landscape of German education.

According to Koselleck, the connection between experience and expectation always also includes a prognosis. Applying this to the German PISA case, one can assume that the PISA debate included claims and assumptions of the future. In this regard, Koselleck drew attention to how this connection and the prognostic structure of it together make visible the possible alternative and changeable character of historical time (*die Veränderbarkeit geschichtlicher Zeit*).⁸¹ These categories thus indicate, at best put in German, the “*Zeitlichkeit des Menschen und der Geschichte*”⁸²; they thus make more comprehensible the changeability and contingency of human action and thinking. That is why I consider them appropriate tools to examine ideas that easily fall into the category of taken-for-granted phenomena.

Problem definitions and representations

The second angle builds on the concepts of experience and expectation. Koselleck also notes that there is no history existing without it being constituted through the experiences and expectations of active human agents.⁸³ This leads to the social constructionist approach of Malcolm Spector and John Kitsuse and later Carol Bacchi, who in approach to social problems deflected attention away from any ‘objective conditions’ to the representations and definitions of conditions.⁸⁴ In order to trace the experience and expectations of the GEW commentators I will ask how they defined the situation, which nationwide was problematised as “shocking”.

⁸⁰ Koselleck, 350–359.

⁸¹ Koselleck, 357–359.

⁸² Koselleck, 354.

⁸³ Koselleck, 351.

⁸⁴ Bacchi, Carol (2009) *Analysing Policy: What is the problem represented to be?* French Forest, N.S.W.: Pearson; Spector, Malcolm & Kitsuse, John I. (1977) *Constructing social problems*. Menlo Park, California: Cummings Pub. Co.

In the previous subchapter I discussed the dominant educational discourse in which PISA acts as part of the current tendency of advocating evidence-based policymaking in Western industrialised societies. Bacchi's application of challenging such a "paradigm of problem solving" provides methodological tools for opening or at least loosening the tight knot around taken-for-granted assumptions. There is a lack of consideration of this aspect in many accounts analysing the German PISA reactions.⁸⁵ Therefore, I lean on Bacchi's approach to shift from 'problem solving' to 'problem questioning'. Spector and Kitsuse's thorough work from 1977 elaborates the significance of scrutinising the definitions of problems instead of focusing on the 'problematic' conditions. With Bacchi's WPR approach, short for "what is the problem represented to be", one can take Spector and Kitsuse's understanding further.⁸⁶

Spector and Kitsuse highlight the difference of examining how individuals react to a threatening condition from asking, how individuals construct reality by recognising a condition and defining it as threatening. Instead of conventionally thinking that "troublesome conditions" create dissatisfaction followed by institutional responses, Spector and Kitsuse state that "the establishment of an agency authorised to deal with certain conditions generates dissatisfactions among populations about conditions that previously were unseen or routinely accommodated".⁸⁷ The OECD, in its mandate of producing solutions to educational problems can be seen as such an agency.

As Spector and Kitsuse point out: "Every experience of displeasure and dissatisfaction has its origins in the availability, if not promise, of remedies, cures, reforms, and solutions for such troubles."⁸⁸ In other words, the definition of something as a problem derives from a subjective discovery that it could be changed. In the PISA discourse of comparing national models, it is thus the "discovery" of potential success in some countries that drives the need to conduct such assessments. Accordingly, a few previous analyses on national PISA responses have mentioned that the PISA results as such did not cause a shock in itself but that they had to be defined as problematic, which

⁸⁵ E.g. Gruber; Ertl; Imhof; Leschinsky, Achim (2005) Vom Bildungsrat (nach) zu PISA. Eine zeitgeschichtliche Studie zur deutschen Bildungspolitik. *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, 51(6), 818–839.

⁸⁶ Bacchi; Spector & Kitsuse.

⁸⁷ Spector & Kitsuse, 45, 84.

⁸⁸ Spector & Kitsuse, 84.

occurred, for instance, in Germany but to a lesser extent in the United States.⁸⁹

Spector and Kitsuse state, leaning on Blumer (1971): “Deprivation or exploitation or even starvation cannot account for how a specific group of people *formulate their troubles or to whom they turn for redress*”.⁹⁰ Thus, if research focuses on the conditions and asks for causes for certain action, the attention is deflected from the process of how the actors argue and to whom they direct their arguments, and also what kind of assumptions are included in these claims. According to Spector and Kitsuse, all this ought to be the material and sources for the researcher. They thereby conceptualise problem definitions as claims-making activities. Following this, the researcher looks at how claims are expressed and how the agents justify their conduct. A further point from Spector and Kitsuse is that motives, values, and interests are not explaining the conduct to the researcher, but to the research objects themselves. The process of imputation, the perspective of the agents, is the subject matter and part of the data.⁹¹

Bacchi’s approach has a more practical tone: it provides a list of questions to apply in the source analysis. Firstly, Bacchi starts with asking, what is the problem represented to be, and secondly, moves on scrutinising the assumptions that underpin this representation. Next, she draws attention to how the representation has come about. In this respect, Bacchi’s tool for analysing problematisations in fact grasps the issue in a way that complements the history of ideas approach presented above. She highlights the need to consider the historical background of problem representations or, as she borrows Michel Foucault’s concept, the *genealogy* of events. This aspect in particular treats the representations of inevitabilities by looking at the processes behind representations and by revealing implicit power relations. Fourth, Bacchi asks what is left unproblematic in the representation of a ‘problem’. Such silences can be identified by analysing the assumptions surrounding the problem and by asking, where they might distort or misrepresent certain issues. To analyse silences means to examine the conditions in which certain problem representations gain dominance while others are silenced. Genealogies also contribute to the understanding of silences, since they elucidate the problem representations, which have not become dominant.

⁸⁹ Martens & Niemann; Ringarp.

⁹⁰ Spector & Kitsuse, 84. Italics added.

⁹¹ Spector & Kitsuse, 72, 95–96.

The fifth question enquires into the effects that follow from the representation of the problem. Bacchi remarks that effects here are understood differently from a standard policy approach, which evaluates measurable ‘outcomes’. Rather, the WPR approach identifies more subtle effects: for example discursive effects and subjectification effects. In the former category the researcher examines how assumptions and silences surrounding the problem representation have an impact on what is considered necessary for political action and how they may thereby limit the possibilities to think differently. As for subjectification effects, the analysis asks how discourses shape and constitute different social roles. Analysing PISA discussion, one might encounter subject positions such as pupils and teachers, or politicians and statistic experts. Finally, Bacchi asks how and where the representation is produced and how it may ‘travel’.⁹²

In my analysis I will above all focus on the presumptions and silences within the research material: what is said and what is left unsaid. Altogether Bacchi’s tool supports conceiving problematisation as a framing mechanism, in which some issues are emphasised while some are left out. This is how these narratives direct our attention and “limit awareness”.⁹³ In other words, representations of problems entail power. Here I lean on Foucault’s understanding of power as productive technique and mechanism, as relations between actors⁹⁴. Foucault stated that to govern means to “structure the possible field of action of others”.⁹⁵ Accordingly, Bacchi points out Foucault’s definition of discourse as an “asset, the object of political struggle”⁹⁶. Such action does not have to be conscious in order to have power. My approach presupposes that disseminating definitions and conceptualisations of phenomena such as PISA may affect the actors at the grass root level of educational workers in a similar pattern as political governance influences people in society. Reproduction of certain discourses does not have to be conscious, but its effect depends on how actively and widely they are used⁹⁷.

⁹² Bacchi, 1–16, 43, 58, 61, 224.

⁹³ Bacchi, 262–264.

⁹⁴ Masschelein & Ricken, 143–144.

⁹⁵ Foucault, Michel (1982) *The Subject and Power*. In Dreyfus, Hubert & Rabinow, Paul (eds.) *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and hermeneutics*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 220–221.

⁹⁶ Bacchi, 45.

⁹⁷ See Carvalho.

Problematizing discourses or scrutinizing power relations does not, however, aim at demonizing or deprecating them. As Foucault suggested, all discourses are dangerous, but it is not quite the same as bad⁹⁸. In other words, the aim of drawing attention to the ascendancy of PISA and the discourses that have come to surround it is not the same as suggesting that one should not conduct research on educational issues or aim at basing political decisions on evidence. The point is merely to set influential discourses under critical scrutiny⁹⁹.

Nevertheless, it is not insignificant, which interests and subjective assumptions lie behind a research task. Whereas Spector and Kitsuse specifically underline that one should refrain from giving attention to whether the claims that the research objects make are true or false because it is not the subject matter, Bacchi states that her approach has an “explicitly normative agenda”. In fact, by identifying what is left unproblematic in a representation the researcher takes a stand on which aspects could have been taken into account.¹⁰⁰

The line between staying ‘objective’ and having normative agendas is thus rather thin, an issue of eternal confrontation for a researcher. Particularly historians, however, work by drawing inferences as Jorma Kalela has stated. One is thereby constrained to accept the challenge of simultaneously making assumptions and refraining from inferring too much. Towards the end of the 20th century historians have increasingly agreed with E. H. Carr that recognising one’s preconceptions is a better way to control their influence on the research results than trying to set aside the fact that the researcher is inevitably connected to his or her society.¹⁰¹ In educational research it is also acknowledged that the researcher must acknowledge his or her subjectivity; if the researcher would claim to be completely external to his or her research objects, he or she would have chosen the positivistic approach, that is, expecting that social phenomena could be researched with

⁹⁸ Foucault 1983, cited in Popkewitz, Thomas S. (2000) *National Imaginaries, the Indigenous Foreigner, and Power: Comparative Educational Research*. In Schriewer, Jürgen (ed.) *Discourse Formation in Comparative Education*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2nd ed., 294.

⁹⁹ See Hopfenbeck et al., 15.

¹⁰⁰ Spector & Kitsuse, 77–78; Bacchi, 44, 68.

¹⁰¹ See Kalela, Jorma (2000) *Historiantutkimus ja historia*. Helsinki: Gaudeamus, 57–58, 73–95, 170–171, 232–235; Hyrkkänen, 252.

similar expectations and tools as natural phenomena.¹⁰² In the end, Bacchi's approach does not intend to offer any particular program for change, but merely ways to detach oneself from dominant discourses and to open up different reflections on them.

To summarise the viewpoints of my approach, two aspects ought to be highlighted. Firstly, all the aspects presented concentrate on scrutinising the *how* instead of the *why*, thus the focus is at the process of argumentation and the active construction of meanings. Secondly, the approaches of experience and expectation interlock with problem representations since they both acknowledge the alternative character of history; both call for the need to grasp that things could have been different and that definitions of problems are contingent and path dependent.¹⁰³ This is the reason why it is important to scrutinise representations of "truths" and "inevitabilities" — to loosen the knot around the claims of the "only possible options".

1.4 Research material

The *Gewerkschaft Erziehung und Wissenschaft* (the German Education Union), GEW, is the largest teachers' union in Germany, representing a wide spectrum of educational workers from kindergartens and general education to higher education, adult education and research. Founded in 1948, the GEW represented 264 684 educational workers in 2002.¹⁰⁴ The organisation is not only attending to the interests of its members and their working conditions, but also campaigning for educational reforms.¹⁰⁵

Although the GEW states that it is not committed to any political party, it has been characterised as belonging rather to the left side.¹⁰⁶ Compared to other teachers'

¹⁰² See e.g. Manion, Lawrence, Cohen, Louis, Morrison, Keith (2013) *Research Methods in Education*. Abingdon: Routledge, 7, 15.

¹⁰³ Hyrkkänen, 246; Bacchi, 44; Spector & Kitsuse, 75–76; Koselleck 357–359.

¹⁰⁴ Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund (no date) DGB-Mitgliederzahlen 2000–2009. <http://www.dgb.de/uber-uns/dgb-heute/mitgliederzahlen/2000-2009>. Accessed 8 January 2018; Kopitzsch, Wolfgang (2017) Die Gründung der Arbeitsgemeinschaft deutscher Lehrerverbände (AGDL) 1945 bis 1949 und die Entstehung der GEW (ADLLV). In Dowe, Dieter, Fuchs, Eckhardt, Mätzing, Heike Christina & Sammler, Steffen (eds.) *Georg Eckert: Grenzgänger zwischen Wissenschaft und Politik*. Göttingen: V&R unipress, 62.

¹⁰⁵ GEW (no date) The German Education union. <http://www.gew.de/ueber-uns/the-german-education-union>. Accessed 8 January 2018.

¹⁰⁶ Waldow 2010a, 500–501.

organisations in German, the GEW is more active on the field of school politics.¹⁰⁷ Among its political goals, the GEW particularly advocates the postponing of tracking pupils to different school forms and pleads a comprehensive school system. Other most important teachers' associations in Germany include the *Deutscher Lehrerverband* (DL) and the *Verband Bildung und Erziehung* (VBE). Whereas the VBE concentrates on primary education, the DL is an umbrella organisation of several unions targeted at different German secondary school forms. In contrast to the GEW, the DL supports the retention of the three-tier school structure in Germany.¹⁰⁸

In this thesis I examine the discussions about PISA 2000 in the GEW membership magazine *E&W (Erziehung und Wissenschaft)*. I have chosen to examine the membership magazine to trace the experience of the contemporaries as originally as it is possible in a work of this kind. Using interviews as sources, for instance, might lead to different results than analysing content on material written at the time.

However, there are certain issues to take into account when using a trade union magazine as research material. The magazine contains multiple voices: members of the executive board, researchers, journalists, politicians and representatives of all the sections the GEW represents: from kindergarten to vocational education, from all secondary school forms to university teachers. Thus, the authors are not merely teachers. Consequently, the spectrum of commentators is rather wide and may provide a combination of conflicting standpoints. Although I have named this master's thesis and the analysing chapters as "teachers' discussion", it is evident that the GEW's teachers do not represent all the teachers in Germany. As a result, this analysis can provide only a limited view to the field workers' perceptions on PISA. Moreover, the teachers and educationists in the GEW had a connection to politics through the trade union interests.

Another point to remark upon is that the texts published in the magazine with full names of the authors do not, according to the *E&W*, necessarily represent the stance of the magazine or the organisation. Although one therefore cannot draw conclusions of the opinion of the entire organisation, I do not consider it insignificant or purely

¹⁰⁷ Hartong, 208.

¹⁰⁸ Overesch, Anne (2007) *Wie die Schulpolitik ihre Probleme (nicht) löst*. Münster: Waxmann, 236.

coincidental what kind of statements a magazine prints for its members. Since the GEW states as its aim to inform its members of educational politics and professional issues¹⁰⁹, the discussions are therefore to a certain degree interpreted as a result of purposeful action.

In order to understand the character of the research material one should keep in mind that the discussions in the magazine do not entirely consist of teachers' perspectives and opinions but also of information and perspectives directed towards teachers. In other words, I do not regard the organisation merely as an arena for teachers' perspectives and positions, but also as having a purpose in guiding teachers' opinions from the perspective of the organisation. It is especially relevant for my research approach to acknowledge the aspect that the magazine may affect the interpretation of teachers, especially in the case of PISA. This does not, however, implicate that all or even the majority of the members would automatically share the official GEW statements. After all, this thesis does not attempt to find answers to the question of teachers' *opinions*, nor does it expect to find a unified viewpoint of GEW-minded teachers to PISA. Rather, the intention is to perceive the understanding of PISA within the E&W discussion and draw a picture of it accordingly.

According to my research task I look at the initial reactions to PISA 2000, starting with the publication of the PISA results on 4th December 2001. In this thesis I begin to analyse the E&W material from the December 2001 issue, which already treated the published PISA results. In Germany, apart from the international PISA comparison, an additional study PISA-E (PISA-*Erweiterung*) was conducted in order to compare the results of the states with each other. The release of the results of the PISA-E in June 2002 played an integral role in the national PISA debate, especially since they were published three months before the federal elections in September 2002 and thereby became a campaign issue.¹¹⁰

In order to take these contextual events into account, I have decided to cover the E&W material until the September 2002 issue, and end the analysis at the election debate.

¹⁰⁹ GEW (no date) Leistungen im Überblick. <http://www.gew.de/ueber-uns>. Accessed 8 January 2018.

¹¹⁰ Tillmann et al., 19.

Additionally, I have read the E&W material before and after the research period of December 2001 to September 2002 in order to better identify the changes and continuations that the release of the PISA results may have affected. I have included all the E&W texts and articles during the research period, which mention PISA and/or the OECD. Additionally, articles that concern comparisons of the German education system to foreign systems have been considered also in those cases where PISA was not explicitly mentioned.

The analysis of the E&W material contains direct citations from the magazine, which I have translated into English. The original versions can be found in the footnotes. Occasionally I have added italics to the citations in order to highlight aspects I regard as significant. In some occasions German terms are included in the text if considered relevant. Particularly the concept *Bildung* has such specific connotations in the German language that when deemed expedient, I have used the German instead of the English term 'education', in order to avoid misunderstandings and underline the attached meanings that I have considered essential for the research task.¹¹¹

1.5 Analysis and outline

In this introduction chapter I have presented as my research task to trace German teachers' perspective on PISA 2000 and to place their reactions into a larger international context. The thesis focuses on the tension between international and national by exploring how the GEW related to internationalisation and globalisation of education on the one hand and, how they identified with the traditional and structural aspects of German education on the other hand.

In the following I present my research questions. With research questions I refer here to the questions with which I approach the E&W material. In other words, the questions posed to the research objects are the tools that contribute to solving the research task. These questions help me to analyse the GEW's PISA discussion from the viewpoints presented in the previous sections.

¹¹¹ For more specific information about the historical background of the concept of *Bildung*, see Horlacher, Rebekka (2011) *Bildung*. Bern: Haupt Verlag.

Firstly, my approach concerns the experience and expectation of the GEW agents, and therefore I start with asking, (1) *how the German PISA results and those of other countries were represented and interpreted* in the magazine. This question predominantly guides chapters two and three. In order to further trace the representations of problems, I additionally ask the following questions: (2) *what was represented as problematic and what was regarded as successful concerning PISA?* (3) *What kinds of consequences or solutions were suggested?* (4) *What kinds of assumptions were surrounding the representations?* (5) *What was silenced or left unproblematic?* By applying these questions to the research material, I attempt to eventually discover (6) *what kinds of roles were attached to PISA in the problem representations.* The aforementioned questions further aim at revealing (7) *how PISA was framed as an institution and how its background was evaluated.*

The analysis of the E&W material is conducted gradually in the following three chapters, which build on each other. Chapter two will examine the discussion of the German results, whereas chapter three concentrates on comparisons to other countries by examining how success in PISA was defined and evaluated and what kind of conclusions were drawn in relation to the perceived German situation. Chapter four is based on the findings of the previous chapters and takes the analysis further by scrutinising the function that was attached to PISA in the discourses. With chapter five I discuss the findings and present my conclusion.

While PISA was discussed in the E&W magazine, the assessment was also a topic of great public interest in the German society and among educationists. Apart from analysing the E&W material I will take into account academic viewpoints to PISA in Germany in order to contextualise the GEW's discourses.

2 Teachers' discussion of the German PISA results

I begin this chapter by looking at the initial experiences in the E&W after the release of the PISA results. The explanations and claims concerning the perceived situation will be analysed in further subchapters. In the public PISA discussion, German newspapers had reported a “failure” of German schools and a defeat that German pupils and teachers suffered¹¹². The reactions in the E&W aligned with the nationwide PISA shock, and the matter was approached in a serious manner. The chair of the GEW executive board at the time, Eva-Maria Stange, commented the PISA results in December right after the publication and stated that German schools “played in the third league” in international comparison. To PISA she referred as “undeniable facts on the table”.¹¹³ The editorial continued the tone of national shame by referring to the “miserable certificate” Germany had received from PISA. No signs of questioning the “embarrassingly poor ranking” of Germany were visible in the initial reactions. It was stated that through PISA the efficacy and culture of German schools were put under question.¹¹⁴

The concept of Germany playing in another league and the references to national shame remained in the following E&W issues¹¹⁵. The first reactions in December 2001 signalled a conviction that the whole country lay behind compared to other countries, it was thus presupposed that all schools failed. Max Loewe, one of the E&W editors, attributed the results to the incapability of the German school system to compensate the “learning disadvantages” (*Lernnachteile*) related to socioeconomic background. He characterised the large German group of weak performing pupils:

According to PISA these pupils lack elementary skills. They can indeed technically read but they do have problems to draw conclusions out of what they

¹¹² E.g. Spiewak, Martin (2001) Die Schule brännt. *Die Zeit* 50/2001, 6 December 2001. http://www.zeit.de/2001/50/Die_Schule_braennt. Accessed 20 February 2018.

¹¹³ “Im internationalen Vergleich spielten ‘Deutschlands Schulen in der dritten Liga’. Dafür lägen nun nicht zu leugnende Fakten auf dem Tisch.” Befund. E&W 12/2001, 8.

¹¹⁴ Editorial. E&W 12/2001, 3; Kahl, Reinhard (2001b) Depressive Zirkel gibt es genug. E&W 12/2001, 2.

¹¹⁵ Kaffeesatzleserei. E&W 6/2002, 4; Demmer, Marianne (2002b) Warten auf PISA-E. E&W 6/2002, 5; Scheich, Henning (2002) Motor für Lernprozesse. E&W 6/2002, 12.

read; they are hardly capable of functioning in an adult or working life.¹¹⁶

Loewe therefore immediately accepted, that the PISA tests could determine the extent to which these pupils were going to be capable citizens. An educational journalist Reinhard Kahl similarly pointed out how “our” good pupils were “only internationally average” and the weak ones were “indeed at a Third World level”.¹¹⁷ Kahl’s Third World reference along with the third league statements and Loewe’s working life conclusions put uncritical trust in the PISA study and its capability of evaluating Germany’s school system and success as a country. Although only implicitly, these responses also hinted that German economic strength was threatened. Moreover, this argumentation pattern raises the question of what was meant with the “Third World level”, as in the 2000 results the only participating non-OECD countries included Brazil, the Russian Federation, Liechtenstein and Latvia¹¹⁸.

Despite calling for a positive reformation attitude, Kahl gave a rather defeatist diagnosis: “PISA shows, the German *Sonderweg* in Bildung has failed”.¹¹⁹ This and other references to the German “*Sonderweg*” in the PISA context reinforced the common interpretation of the situation in the magazine: Germany was represented to fundamentally differ from other educational systems based on PISA results.¹²⁰ The historical weight of the *Sonderweg* concept intensified the implied severity of the issue. Notable was though, that Kahl presented similar arguments based on OECD data already before PISA¹²¹, and thereby his PISA reception seemed to base on his existing opinions of the German education.

These reactions showed how the E&W discussion steadfastly accepted that PISA indicated system performance. Following the overall public discussion of PISA in

¹¹⁶ “Diesen Schülern fehlen laut Pisa-Befund elementare Kenntnisse. Sie können zwar technisch lesen, haben aber Probleme, daraus Schlüsse zu ziehen und sind kaum berufs- oder lebensfähig.” Loewe, Max (2001) Ergebnis – Am Geld allein liegt’s nicht. E&W 12/2001, 6–7.

¹¹⁷ Kahl 2001b.

¹¹⁸ OECD (2001) Knowledge and skills for life. Paris: OECD Publications, 15.

¹¹⁹ Kahl 2001b.

¹²⁰ Hebenstreit-Müller, Sabine & Müller, Burkhard (2002) Deutscher Sonderweg – Warum Kitas Bildungseinrichtungen werden müssen. E&W 4/2002, 12; Der erste und der zweite Blick - Eine erste Analyse der Ergebnisse. E&W 7–8/2002, 11–12.

¹²¹ Kahl, Reinhard (2001a) Weak Germany. E&W 7–8/2001, 22.

Germany¹²², the E&W discussion called for search for causes and answers (*Ursachenforschung*) as the essential task “after the first act of PISA drama”. Stange called for a “merciless” investigation without taboos¹²³, which already indicated that she expected similar political battles as in previous German school debates.¹²⁴ A special “PISA details” series from February until April showed how the magazine attempted to trace correlations within the PISA data in order to explain and understand the results with the help of researchers.¹²⁵ This might have been not least in order to widen teachers’ understanding of PISA.

The following sections examine explanations given to the national PISA results in the E&W. Two rough categories could be distinguished: while some arguments saw the German system level accounting for the PISA results, others highlighted the impact of German cultural values and attitudes. Naturally, these categories overlapped in practice even within single articles. Therefore, the outline does not represent any absolute classifications in the E&W material but is merely a tool in the attempt to identify different levels of argumentation.

2.1 Selective system

From the very first reported reactions to PISA in the E&W it was clear which stand the GEW took: the causes were “not only due to school praxis” but also the school system had to be scrutinised.¹²⁶ Later in June 2002, the message was clearer in the “school expert” of the GEW board, Marianne Demmer’s argumentation: the system and its boundaries prevented “peak performance” (*Spitzenleistungen*).¹²⁷

¹²² See Tillmann et al., 44–45.

¹²³ Befund. E&W, 12/2001, 8.

¹²⁴ Welzel, Steffen (2002a) Erfolgreiche Länder haben integrierte Systeme. E&W 1/2002, 24–25; Befund. E&W, 12/2001, 8.

¹²⁵ Welzel, Steffen (2002b) Lernbedingungen von Jugendlichen. E&W 2/2002, 23; Ballauf, Helga (2002a) Vom Umgang mit Obstgärten, Kindbettfieber und Baumdiagrammen. E&W 2/2002, 26; van Ackeren, Isabell (2002a) PISA-Details 2, Familiäre Lebensverhältnisse und Schülerleistungen. E&W 3/2002, 23–25; van Ackeren, Isabell (2002b) PISA-Details 3, Institutionelle Bedingungen schulischen Lernens – PISA-Ergebnisse und Empfehlungen. E&W 4/2002, 23–26; van Ackeren, Isabell (2002c) Institutionelle Bedingungen schulischen Lernens (Teil 2). E&W 5/2002, 19–21.

¹²⁶ Befund. E&W, 12/2001, 8.

¹²⁷ Demmer, Marianne (2002c) Ja zur Heterogenität! E&W 6/2002, 16.

From the initial reactions onwards, the PISA discussion in the E&W in various ways argued that the PISA results had finally proven the failure of the German three-tier school structure.¹²⁸ As the reception of the results throughout the E&W did not question the claim that PISA had in a tenable way measured system performance, the argumentation focused on identifying the defaults of the German system:

The transfer to the Sonderschule is a typical part of the German school system. The strategy of the German education system was and is to form learning groups as homogeneous as possible. Identificating who should or is allowed to learn in which school form receives much more attention than individual support.¹²⁹

In the search of explanations for PISA the E&W turned continuously to the expertise of researchers. While the GEW authors appeared rather unanimous in their argumentation that PISA results had proven the failure of German three-tier school structure, the interviews of PISA experts entailed a diverging pattern: the question of causal connections between early tracking and achievement was treated cautiously. Nonetheless, it seemed that by asking leading questions, the interviewers attempted to find expert proof for the GEW interpretation.¹³⁰ This seemed to put the interviewees in a position, where they had to refrain from making causal inferences, but the eventual message depended significantly on their views. One researcher often cited in the E&W, Klaus Klemm, for instance started with the cautious pattern but finally argued rather straightforwardly that the reason would lie in the tracking system:

[PISA] gives strong hints that it is precisely the early sorting [...] owing to the fact that students with low learning levels perform particularly poorly. Pushing adolescents into a less stimulating learning environment, this is what the PISA authors work out clearly, slows down their development potential.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Kahl 2001b; Welzel, Steffen (2001b) Analyse – Preis der frühen Auslese. E&W 12/2001, 10–12.

¹²⁹ “Die Überweisung an die Sonderschule ist ein typischer Teil des deutschen Schulwesens. Die Strategie des deutschen Bildungssystems war und ist, möglichst homogene Lerngruppen zu bilden. Der Identifizierung, wer in welcher Schulform lernen soll bzw. darf, wird viel mehr Aufmerksamkeit gewidmet als der individuellen Förderung.” Schnell, Irmtraud & Kehl, Ulla (2002) Der selektive Blick: Sonderschule – Die Schule für sozial benachteiligte Kinder. E&W 4/2002, 25–26.

¹³⁰ Welzel, Steffen 2002a; Welzel, Steffen 2001b.

¹³¹ “[PISA] gibt starke Hinweise darauf, dass es gerade dem frühen Sortieren [...] zu verdanken ist, dass lernschwache Schülerinnen und Schüler besonders schlechte Leistungen erbringen. Das Abschieben von Heranwachsenden in ein anregungsärmeres Lernmilieu, dies arbeiten die PISA-Autoren deutlich heraus, bremst deren Entwicklungspotential.” Welzel, Steffen 2001b, 11.

Klemm's formulation showed how in the end it was difficult to distinguish claims of causal effects from the more statistically adequate ones. Nevertheless, PISA experts could be cited to claim that the poor and meagre learning conditions in *Hauptschulen*, in the lowest track of the three-tier system, accounted for the low scores.

Overall the PISA reactions in the E&W focused on the “shocking” conditions of the weakest performing pupils in Germany. The result according to which there was a relatively large group of German pupils scoring low in the PISA tests was used in the magazine as an argument against the prevailing three-tier system. However, especially in the initial reactions there was also a tendency to argue against the advocates of the German school system by calling attention to the moderate scores of the highest achieving German pupils. Kahl argued that the PISA results had proven the “anachronistic” three-tier structure could not be defended anymore:

The main argument for early selection was to satisfy the more gifted part of the population by higher school forms. It is over. The Gymnasium does not meet its own requirements of elite education.¹³²

Klemm likewise directed his statement against the advocates of the current school system:

The friends of tracked school structures have to be told: The reward for this price does not ensue. The separate instruction of pupils with higher performance in Gymnasium does not catapult this group into the international top field.¹³³

The common pattern of argumentation followed what was presented as the opponents' idea that early tracking and homogeneous learning groups should lead to higher results, yet PISA was said to belie this.¹³⁴ An opposing argument was published from a minister

¹³² “Das Hauptargument für die frühe Selektion hieß, dem begabteren Teil der Bevölkerung durch höheren Schulen gerecht werden. Es ist dahin. Das Gymnasium wird in seinem eigenen Anspruch Elitebildung nicht gerecht.” Kahl 2001b.

¹³³ “Die Freunde gegliederter Schulstrukturen müssen sich sagen lassen: Der Lohn für diesen Preis stellt sich nicht ein. Die getrennte Unterrichtung der leistungsstärkeren Schüler und Schülerinnen in Gymnasien katapultiert diese Gruppe durchaus nicht in das internationale Spitzenfeld.” Welzel, Steffen 2001b, 11.

¹³⁴ Loewe, 6–7; Demmer, Marianne (2001) Bittere Wahrheiten. E&W 12/2001, 9; Kahl 2001b; Endres Gerhard L. (2002) Übertriebene Hektik ist nicht förderlich. E&W 2/2002, 17–19.

of the conservative party CDU/CSU, Hans Zehetmair, who stated in an interview that according to PISA Germany could keep up with the international level when it came to high performance.¹³⁵ This indicated how different the interpretations of PISA in fact could be. Additionally, it seemed that these PISA discourses argued more *with* PISA using it as an argument rather than actually explained or dealt with the results.

Klemm paid particular attention to the gap of 37 PISA score points between “our” strongest performers and those of Australia, the front-runner of the highest performers as Klemm phrased. The discourse focusing on the “international forefront” (*Internationale Spitze*) appeared several times and without further discussion of the possible contextual or contingent factors behind these “peak positions” (*Spitzenpositionen*) or “peak values” (*Spitzenwerte*).¹³⁶ Giving high value to the ranking on top was compatible with the initial reactions discussed before, which framed the German PISA results as national shame. In fact, the discourse was also turned upside down by declaring that Germany was the *Spitze* only in terms of social selection.¹³⁷ It seemed that being on the “top” was a goal in itself. The fixation on “peak values” on the one hand implied unconditional reliance on the PISA measures as indicators of “reality”.

Paying attention to the PISA values in educational expenses between countries was one of the explanation categories framed with “consequences from the PISA disaster”.¹³⁸ Comparisons of educational investments focused on the lower values in Germany compared to other countries regarding primary education.¹³⁹ Whereas Ulrich Thöne from the GEW remained steadfast in his opinion, the correlation between German low investments and low average scores was not “a pure coincidence”, the PISA Director Andreas Schleicher and researcher Klemm were more cautious in their argumentation. For Thöne the “standardised criteria” of the OECD data was enough legitimation to

¹³⁵ Endres.

¹³⁶ E.g. Demmer 2002c, 16; Welzel, Steffen 2001b, 11.

¹³⁷ Welzel, Steffen 2001b, 11.

¹³⁸ Ehmann, Christoph (2002) Wer hat, dem wird gegeben. E&W 3/2002, 6; Welzel, Steffen 2001b, 12; van Ackeren 2002c; Schleicher, Andreas (2002) Schlüssel für die Zukunft. E&W 3/2002, 2.

¹³⁹ Haas-Rietschel, Helga (2002a) Mehr Geld für die Grundschulen. E&W 3/2002, 18; Schleicher; Welzel, Steffen 2001b, 12.

draw further conclusions.¹⁴⁰ Although Schleicher and Klemm, too, argued by comparing GDP percentages spent for education between Finland and Germany, they again avoided direct causal inferences. They defined PISA's role rather vaguely to be a reason to "think about the distribution of educational investments" and emphasised that not only money played a role but also "quality of results". With this Schleicher referred to Finland, Korea, Sweden and the UK outperforming Germany despite their lower educational expenses.¹⁴¹

It seemed that PISA could simultaneously indicate two slightly diverging conclusions: less investments in German early education were framed as a partial explanation to the results, while at the same time PISA provided justification that not money alone led to success, proven by the high results of countries with less investment. When experts argued with PISA data in the E&W, they often presented comparisons of German PISA values to the OECD average ones as a basis of presented deficits in the German system.¹⁴² However, it remained ambiguous what kind of inferences one should have drawn based on these proposals to ponder the educational expenses. In fact, it seemed that the main point was merely to underline the devastating gap between Germany and other countries.

In fact, Schleicher's commentary with numerous statistical comparisons and details is likely to have left a slightly ambiguous impression, particularly considering teachers as the audience of the magazine. There was a contrast between two types of argumentation: the technical expert voices and the E&W attempts to elucidate the PISA findings with technical expertise on the one hand¹⁴³, and the rather political argumentation of non-technician authors on the other hand. Still, explaining PISA results with financial resources received in total a minor role in the magazine from the initial reactions onwards¹⁴⁴. Criticism based on financial deficits was later linked to the

¹⁴⁰ Thöne, Ulrich (2002a) Suche in der falschen Richtung. E&W 3/2002, 10.

¹⁴¹ Schleicher; Welzel, Steffen 2002a, 23.

¹⁴² E.g. van Ackeren 2002c; Schleicher.

¹⁴³ See the PISA Details series: Welzel, Steffen 2002b, 23; Ballauf 2002a, 26; van Ackeren 2002a; van Ackeren 2002b; van Ackeren 2002c.

¹⁴⁴ Loewe.

GEW campaign statement, according to which persisting values in the society and politics prevented the appropriate resources for education¹⁴⁵.

Among the initial reactions in the E&W it seemed natural to expect the causes to lie in didactic practices. Some comments showed a straightforward conviction that according to PISA “something goes wrong” in German classrooms.¹⁴⁶ Helga Ballauf, one of the E&W editors, seemed convinced of the KMK politicians’ conclusion that most of the “achievement deficit” in German schools could be improved with “pedagogical-didactic” ways.¹⁴⁷

In this case the beliefs obtained a concrete form in the PISA researcher Jürgen Baumert’s interview, where he argued that the PISA results could be traced back to the common style of teaching in Germany, the concept of “*fragend-entwickelnde Unterricht*”. He defined this teaching method as “choreography” of a teacher aiming towards more and more simple questions, which eventually would become trivialised and lead to a convergent but simultaneously meandering style of teaching. Baumert defined this “structure” of German teaching as exhaustive and counterproductive and claimed it to be the reason why Germans failed to cope with heterogeneity in the classroom in an appropriate and individual way. Baumert pointed out, international comparison to “successful integrated systems” had shown that better lesson concepts were possible.¹⁴⁸

Seemingly the “school expert” of the GEW board, Marianne Demmer, had in a later issue accepted this researcher explanation of German school problems as part of her argumentation:

It must become clear that the teacher-centered questioning-developing teaching style tailored to (allegedly) homogenous learning groups is more prone to interference, more exhausting and more threatened by failures than

¹⁴⁵ Rettet die Bildung. E&W 5/2002, 5.

¹⁴⁶ Befund. E&W, 12/2001, 8; Kahl, Reinhard (2002a) LAU, sehr lau. E&W 2/2002, 21; Ballauf, Helga (2002c) Kompetenz in der Sprachförderung. E&W 6/2002, 28.

¹⁴⁷ Ballauf 2002a, 26.

¹⁴⁸ Welzel, Steffen 2002a.

individualised learning oriented towards the pupils' independence.¹⁴⁹

Contrasting the German *fragend-entwickelnde* concept to an “individual” teaching style in other countries – without specifying which countries were compared – was one of the examples in the E&W, which expected the reality to differ remarkably in classrooms outside Germany. In general, the assertion that German classrooms lacked attention to individual differences prevailed in various forms of argumentation. Another example of similar explanations claimed that teachers' belief of standing in front of a homogeneous class led to them practising the teacher-centred teaching style, which again was claimed to level down pupils' individual potential and eventually reduce achievement.¹⁵⁰ Remarkable was, however, that compared to usual cautious argumentation from PISA experts, in this case Baumert's support for the representation of problem was straightforward.

2.2 Selective culture

The perception that the problem lied at the teacher culture continued in various forms. The journalist Kahl described PISA as “a mirror, [which] shows our ugly, smart-alecky traits that often tend to embarrass others.”¹⁵¹ While reforming the school structure was the main argument between the lines of the PISA discussion, there was a wide conviction that the problem of selective structural elements was reflected in many teachers' work and attitudes as well. Kahl's reference to PISA as a mirror made clear his implication that PISA was indicating the truth. Teachers were claimed to focus on the “purity of the school institution” rather than on the future of the pupils.¹⁵²

The peculiar cross of our school system is that if a pupil is in a bad state, teachers in higher school forms tell him, "you do not fit in here, go away". [...] German teachers have virtually an obsession of having the wrong pupils. They

¹⁴⁹ “Es muss deutlich werden, dass der auf (vermeintlich) homogene Lerngruppen zugeschnittene lehrerzentrierte fragend-entwickelnde Unterrichtsstil störanfälliger, anstrengender und stärker von Scheitern bedroht ist als ein auf Eigentätigkeit der Schüler orientiertes individualisiertes Lernen.” Demmer, Marianne (2002a) Riss durchs Lehrerzimmer. E&W 3/2002, 22.

¹⁵⁰ Diehl, Ute (2002b) Vom Nutzen der Unterschiede. E&W 6/2002, 9.

¹⁵¹ “PISA ist ein Spiegel, [und] zeigt unsere hässlichen, besserwisserischen, häufig zur Demütigung anderer neigenden Züge.” Kahl 2001b.

¹⁵² Schnell & Kehl.

are quick with contempt. This leads to a fatal atmosphere. Pupils interpret it like this: you are not welcome here.¹⁵³

Some consider the (supposedly) homogenous learning group and the necessary selection as the basic requirement for successful working. [...] Pupils who are 'not conforming' or are 'too stupid' are then 'themselves to blame' and have to 'bear the consequences'.¹⁵⁴

The arguments above were tied up with the accusation, the “system logic” led German teachers to delegate their problems further, that is, to lower school forms instead of taking responsibility. Teachers were seen to shift the responsibility to the pupils.¹⁵⁵ Additionally, other critics defined the German strict and “outmoded” grading system to be the German problem: teachers’ compartmentalised way of thinking was said to kill children’s motivation and creativity.¹⁵⁶

On the other hand, attention was also given to the PISA result according to which there was a deficit in German teachers’ diagnostic competence.¹⁵⁷ This was one of the measures of the KMK as a response to PISA as well: to increase diagnosis of weaknesses and strengths¹⁵⁸. Partially it was contradictory to the GEW viewpoint, according to which teachers were already excessively compartmentalising pupils.

Explaining low achievement with a perceived culture of disregard did not otherwise seem to be something the authors would have drawn from the PISA data, rather, it seemed to derive from already existing opinions. Demmer, however, tried to link her argumentation to the PISA results:

¹⁵³ “Das besondere Kreuz unseres Schulsystems ist doch: Wenn ein Schüler schlecht steht, sagen ihm die Lehrer auf der höheren Schule, “hier bist du falsch, geh ab”. [...] Deutsche Lehrer haben geradezu eine Obsession, die falschen Schüler zu haben. Sie sind fix mit Verachtung. Das führt zu einer fatalen Grundstimmung. Schüler interpretieren sie so: Willkommen bist du nicht.” Kahl 2001b.

¹⁵⁴ “Die einen halten die (vermeintlich) homogene Lerngruppe und die dazu notwendige Selektion für die Grundvoraussetzung erfolgreichen Arbeitens. [...] Schüler, die ‘nicht spüren’ oder ‘zu dumm’ sind, sind danach ‘selbst Schuld’ und müssen die ‘Konsequenzen tragen’.” Demmer 2002a, 21.

¹⁵⁵ Kahl 2001b; Demmer 2002a, 21.

¹⁵⁶ Wilhelm, Arnold (2002) Überbleibsel. E&W 5/2002, 34; Winter, Felix (2002) Chance für Schüler und Schule. E&W 2/2002, 22, 27.

¹⁵⁷ Welzel, Steffen 2001b, 12; van Ackeren 2002c.

¹⁵⁸ KMK 2002, 7–8, 13–14.

The pronounced selection mechanisms in Germany exert on teachers no 'compulsion to care'. This is reflected, for example, in the PISA result, according to which pupils especially in the German Gymnasium find the support of their teachers very low. Only four countries have lower scores than Germany.¹⁵⁹

Reliance on PISA score points was a straightforward legitimization of Demmer's argumentation: it drew one particular value and linked it to the overall interpretation of selective attitudes as the explanatory factor. This does not yet allow one to infer, to what extent Demmer actually believed that these PISA variables defined the German educational reality, and to what extent it was a matter of framing a single PISA finding to fit and legitimate an already existing statement.

The fact that teachers were subjects of public criticism in the PISA debate was taken into account in the E&W¹⁶⁰; on the other hand as I have shown in this subchapter, the E&W argumentation partially participated in this criticism. However, it is interesting to what extent a magazine for teachers can set accusations directly at their audience. Apart from the GEW and researcher voices standing behind the assertion that outmoded teacher methods or teachers' attitudes were a major reason behind the PISA results, a few readers of the E&W criticised their colleagues for incompetence as well.¹⁶¹ In contrast, several commentators defended teachers by drawing attention to the poor socioeconomic and structural conditions in the society in total. They criticised the hasty way of politicians or the GEW suggesting curricula changes, teachers' teamwork and teacher training reforms or asking teachers to develop support concepts in the situation, where teachers were already overloaded with their everyday work challenges.¹⁶² Thereby it seemed that the E&W treated this tense topic – considering its audience – from rather diverse angles.

¹⁵⁹ "Die stark ausgeprägten Selektionsmechanismen in Deutschland üben auf die Lehrer keinen 'Zwang zum Kümmern' aus. Dies schlägt sich dann zum Beispiel in dem PISA-Ergebnis nieder, wonach Schülerinnen und Schüler vor allem deutschen Gymnasien die Unterstützung durch ihre Lehrer als sehr niedrig empfinden. Nur vier Länder haben noch niedrige Werte als Deutschland." Demmer 2002a, 21–22.

¹⁶⁰ Alexander, Uta (2002) Weg vom Ruch des Laberfachs. E&W 1/2002, 6.

¹⁶¹ Büttner, Manfred (2002) Geschichte. E&W 2/2002, 40; Thomsen, Helga (2002) Selbstreflexion. E&W 4/2002, 40.

¹⁶² Eickhoff, Georg (2002) Kurve. E&W 2/2002, 40; Roever, Sabine (2002) Wer? E&W 2/2002, 42; Donath, Marion (2002) Engpässe. E&W 4/2002, 40; Senkspiel, Jörg (2002) Verärgert. E&W 6/2002, 33.

The cultural values of selection and irresponsibility were not merely seen to be inherent in teachers' attitudes but to prevail in the whole society as a continuous force. The GEW campaign "Save the Bildung" (*Rettet die Bildung*) in spring 2002 declared to reject what they perceived as the existing societal persistence on selection instead of support.¹⁶³ Demmer seemed to suggest, educational reality in societies could consist of either the idea of early selection or individual support. She saw this inherent concept battle in German school politics deriving from the fronts of the previous school debate in the 1960s and 1970s.¹⁶⁴ Demmer made a clear contrast between Germany and other countries: she claimed that through the fact that Germany had not implemented a thorough educational reform in contrast to "many other European countries", the German education had ended up to be a "mishmash of both philosophies".¹⁶⁵ With this she seemed to imply, all these other countries would have explicitly decided to base their system on the sole idea of individual support. Thus again, a fundamental gap between the German reality and other countries was represented without commenting the possible contextual factors behind other countries' situations.

What Kahl in his initial reaction to PISA in December 2001 had declared as "pedagogical destruction force of our system"¹⁶⁶, Demmer defined later in June as the German "homogeneity paradigm".¹⁶⁷ The PISA details series in the E&W commented this "common German complaint" about inconvenient achievement variation in secondary schools by pointing out the PISA finding, which stated that German students' performance within a school was much more homogeneous than in other countries.¹⁶⁸ On the other hand, several adversaries of the three-tier system made use of the PISA finding, according to which there was overlap in the achievement between German school forms. They thus claimed that PISA had shown the allocation of pupils to hierarchical tracks did not accord with the actual skills of pupils.¹⁶⁹

As part of the same argumentative goal PISA therefore provided arguments to show

¹⁶³ *Rettet die Bildung*. E&W 5/2002, 5.

¹⁶⁴ Demmer 2002b.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ "der pädagogischen Destruktivkraft unseres Systems". Kahl 2001b.

¹⁶⁷ Demmer 2002c, 15–16.

¹⁶⁸ van Ackeren 2002b.

¹⁶⁹ Fend, Helmut (2002) Alle fördern – von allen viel verlangen. E&W 6/2002, 2; Klemm, Klaus (2002) System verstärkt soziale Selektion. E&W 5/2002, 22; Demmer 2002c, 17.

both that German classrooms were more homogeneous than others and that the homogeneity still was not what the structure claimed to be. Arguing that the three-tier system was not in reality functioning in the meritocratic way it claimed resembled the 1970s critical theorists' argumentation against the functionalist understanding of schooling.¹⁷⁰ Demmer stated that tracking had not led to the desired homogeneity by referring to "all empirical studies":

The common notion that the highest performers are in Gymnasium, the "middle ones" in Realschule, and the weakest performers in Hauptschule, turns out on closer inspection to be pure fiction.¹⁷¹

This is one of the contexts where it became clear how PISA and empirical studies were seen as representing facts opposed to 'fiction' or common imagination. According to this belief, with PISA one could manage to disprove the represented opposing opinion. Interestingly, Ute Diehl showed in her argumentation for integrated learning groups how the critics themselves may reproduce the exact presumption Demmer criticised:

The school systems in Finland and Sweden have shown through the PISA study that good to very good learning outcomes are not linked to homogeneous learning groups, as is common in the tripartite school system. They may come about just *because strong, middle and weak pupils* are taught together in one group.¹⁷²

Despite her critical take on the German tracking system Diehl seemed to unconsciously define heterogeneity as collecting these three groups into one classroom, assuming that groups of pupils consisted of either strong, middle or weak performers. Even though their opinions on the tracking element converge, Diehl appeared to reproduce this national belief that Demmer criticized in the same E&W issue. Detaching oneself from one's own national context and from the embedded presumptions might thus be more

¹⁷⁰ Sadovnik, Alan R. (2016) Theory and Method in the Sociology of Education. In Sadovnik, Alan R. & Coughlan, Ryan W. (eds.) *Sociology of Education. A Critical Reader*. New York: Routledge, 3rd ed., 6.

¹⁷¹ "Die landläufige Vorstellung, in Gymnasien seien die leistungsfähigsten, in Realschulen die "mittleren" und in Hauptschulen die leistungsschwächeren Schüler anzutreffen, erweist sich bei näherem Hinsehen als pure Fiktion." Demmer 2002c, 17.

¹⁷² "Die Schulsysteme in Finnland und Schweden haben durch die PISA-Studie bewiesen, dass gute bis sehr gute Lernergebnisse nicht geknüpft sind an homogene Lerngruppen, wie sie im dreigliedrigen Schulsystem üblich sind. Sie kommen vielleicht gerade zustande, *weil starke, mittlere und schwache Schüler* gemeinsam in einer Gruppe unterrichtet werden." Diehl 2002b, 6–7. Italics added.

difficult than expected.

Already the initial PISA reactions in the E&W gave a myriad of suggestions for consequences of PISA and solutions for solving the perceived problems in Germany.¹⁷³ The fact that the first issue after PISA under the heading “consequence” published a lengthy and meandering article from a school development professor Hans-Günther Rolff indicated the experienced urgency to turn PISA “feedback” (*Datenrückmeldungen*) into practical administrative and didactic changes. Rolff provided explicit recommendations of curricula changes and teachers’ teamwork hours as part of his plea for “coordinated quality initiative” in order to raise achievement.¹⁷⁴ The existence of an empirical school development perspective in the early reactions was a significant statement even though the focus later turned into discussing the tense topics of the national education politics. Seemingly the GEW had the need to give an active impression by contributing with fast solutions. This was, as Tillmann et al. have written, the public expectation in Germany despite the limitations of the PISA study to provide explicit policy recommendations.¹⁷⁵

In this subchapter I have demonstrated how explaining PISA results in the E&W led to arguments, in which PISA legitimised pre-existing opinions and criticisms of the German system; in various ways the problem was represented to derive from the three-tier school system and its advocates in the society, as well as ignorant attitudes and practices among teachers. Despite including cautious expert statements against causal inferences about integrated systems and success, this was the message expressed throughout the E&W material from various angles. How expert opinions and PISA data analyses were treated in the magazine showed how ambiguous and sometimes contradictory the information was that justified the arguments. As in the nationwide public PISA discourses, in the E&W the demand for explanations was likewise visible¹⁷⁶. In spite of the declared attempts to search for answers, the argumentation with PISA seemed to base on already existing convictions.

¹⁷³ E.g. Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung (2001) Schulen in Deutschland – Empfehlung. E&W 12/2001, 31; Befund. E&W 12/2001, 8–9.

¹⁷⁴ Rolff, Hans-Günther (2001) Konsequenz. E&W 12/2001, 13–14, 16.

¹⁷⁵ Tillmann et al., 44–45.

¹⁷⁶ See Tillmann et al., 44–45.

Therefore analysing how other countries' success in PISA was evaluated and interpreted elucidates more precisely *how* PISA was discussed, which leads us further into understanding the role of PISA in the GEW discourses.

3 Teachers' discussion of successful countries in PISA

In the previous chapter I showed how the reactions to PISA results in the E&W followed the public German interpretations of the situation: PISA was seen to reveal the German "*Bildungsmisere*", which in the GEW perception was understood as deficits of the German educational system particularly in terms of selectivity at both system and cultural level. Following an attitude that resembled the perpetual interest of national policymakers to borrow foreign models¹⁷⁷, the E&W sought for solutions to the represented educational problems by examining other countries' educational systems.¹⁷⁸ This attitude was manifested in GEW-organised excursions to certain countries in spring 2002:

PISA raised the question, what do the others do better? For example Scandinavian countries like Finland or Sweden. In search of answers a group of the GEW executive board travelled at the end of January with journalists and [...] scientists [...] to the land of Pippi Longstocking.¹⁷⁹

Interestingly, Sweden was the first country to be presented in a reportage after the publication of PISA results, even though it was not among the PISA "top performers" such as Finland and England¹⁸⁰, which were the following two countries presented in their own articles. The travel destinations reflected, which countries received particular

¹⁷⁷ Rust, Val D. (2006) Foreign influences in educational reform. In Ertl, Hubert (ed.) *Cross-national attraction in education: accounts from England and Germany*. Oxford: Symposium Books, 23–26.

¹⁷⁸ Welzel, Steffen 2002b, 23; van Ackeren 2002a, 23.

¹⁷⁹ "PISA ließ bei uns die Frage aufkommen, was machen die andern besser? Zum Beispiel skandinavische Länder wie Finnland oder Schweden. Auf der Suche nach Antworten reiste Ende Januar eine Gruppe des GEW-Hauptvorstands zusammen mit Journalisten und [...] Wissenschaftlern [...] ins Land von Pippi Langstrumpf." Haas-Rietschel, Helga (2002b) Pippi Langstrumpf lebt. E&W 3/2002, 28.

¹⁸⁰ In this case, the E&W wrote about the "English school system" and not that of the United Kingdom.

attention in the magazine: Finland and Sweden were the most mentioned reference countries in comparisons throughout the E&W material.¹⁸¹ The United Kingdom, however, also received attention partially due to what was represented as supportive early education principles.¹⁸²

In the following sections, I will continue by examining how the success in PISA was interpreted in the travel reports and in the overall PISA discussion in the magazine.

3.1 Reform capacity as a success factor

In the E&W material discussing successful countries in PISA context the most emphasised feature was the lack of or postponement of tracking in other systems.¹⁸³ As a contrast to the “toxic” German atmosphere of selection, Kahl stated that in the “winner” countries, Japan, Finland or Canada, the German “*Selektionswahn*” did not exist, in Sweden it was according to Kahl “forbidden by law”.¹⁸⁴ The acceptance of the PISA concept of “competence” was implied for instance by stating that “integrated school systems” had partially more than double the amount of young people in the highest competence level as Germany.¹⁸⁵ This statement was justified by a reference to the PISA results but without specifying which countries were meant.

The three country reports focused on explaining the success with the “learning together” of all children in a comprehensive system. Each case, although written by different authors with different perspectives¹⁸⁶ argued that educational reform towards a more inclusive or integrated school system had caused the success.¹⁸⁷ A social democrat politician Hartmut Holzapfel reported from Finland:

¹⁸¹ E.g. Haas-Rietschel 2002a; Thöne 2002a; Klemm; Fend; Diehl 2002b, 6–7.

¹⁸² Hebenstreit-Müller & Müller, 12.

¹⁸³ Welzel, Steffen 2001b, 12; Welzel, Steffen 2002a; Fend; Schnell & Kehl, 26.

¹⁸⁴ Kahl 2001b.

¹⁸⁵ Demmer 2001; Loewe.

¹⁸⁶ The Sweden article was written by an E&W editor, the Finnish one by a SPD politician and the England one by educational researchers.

¹⁸⁷ Haas-Rietschel 2002b; Ratzki, Anne & Schumann, Brigitte (2002) Ausbruch aus dem Teufelskreis? England setzt auf Leistungssteigerung – für alle. E&W 4/2002, 27–29; Holzapfel, Hartmut (2002) Koalition der Vernunft. Warum in finnischen Schulen vieles anders ist. E&W 5/2002, 23–25.

Today, Finland is harvesting: with the results of the PISA study. In Germany one may still often declare, it would not be the time for a structural debate — it is striking, however, how clearly those countries are in the lead, which have managed the transition to comprehensive school or traditionally knew no other school form.¹⁸⁸

Holzapfel further implied how the solution to reform the Finnish education thirty years earlier from a selective system into a comprehensive one had been the “right one”, which Finnish teachers and politicians could now contentedly state.¹⁸⁹ In a similar way, PISA ranking framed the beginning of the England report:

Many years England held the midfield position in international studies. At PISA, it surprisingly appears in the top group. It even comes third among the European countries. Apparently, an ambitious reform programme, with which the New Labour has been modernising its schools since the 1990s, is taking effect.¹⁹⁰

In the case of England the authors Anne Ratzki and Brigitte Schumann thus emphasised the perceived connection between reform and success similarly as in the travel reports of the Nordic welfare state regimes in Finland and Sweden. The explanation for England’s success in the conducted PISA tests in 2000, however, was explicitly deduced from the New Labour politics implemented in the late 1990s. Without considering the aspects of the English system before 1997 when the New Labour government was elected,¹⁹¹ the authors highlighted how the English school structure was a comprehensive one, a “Gesamtschulsystem” with only five percent of private schools, and how it followed the principle of equal opportunity.¹⁹² What was further left without notion was the fact that the New Labour policies still represented relatively recent changes in 2002. As differences between Scandinavian and Anglo-Saxon models

¹⁸⁸ “Heute fährt Finnland die Ernte ein: mit den Ergebnissen der PISA-Studie. Da mag man in Deutschland noch so oft erklären, es sei nicht die Zeit für eine Strukturdebatte – auffallend ist dennoch, wie klar die Länder in Führung liegen, die den Umbau zur Gesamtschule geschafft haben oder traditionell keine andere Schulform kannten.” Holzapfel, 23.

¹⁸⁹ Holzapfel, 25.

¹⁹⁰ “Viele Jahre hielt sich England bei internationalen Untersuchungen im Mittelfeld. Bei PISA taucht es überraschend in der Spitzengruppe auf. Unter den europäischen Ländern liegt es sogar an dritter Stelle. Offenbar greift ein ehrgeiziges Reformprogramm, mit dem New Labour seit den 90er-Jahren seine Schulen modernisiert.” Ratzki & Schumann, 27.

¹⁹¹ Concerning the selective and market-oriented features of the English school system in the 1990s, see e.g. West, Anne & Pennell, Hazel (2000) Publishing School Examination Results in England: incentives and consequences. *Educational Studies*, 26(4), 423–436.

¹⁹² Ratzki & Schumann, 27.

were not discussed further, it seemed that the authors either did not in fact consider England having equality issues or simply ignored such aspects in attempt to reinforce their argumentation about deficits of German education. Eventually it seemed that PISA results were the trigger to treat England in the first place. The atmosphere of the mutual understanding of social democracy between the German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder and the British New Labour from 1999 might have had an effect on the background.¹⁹³ Significant was how the PISA success in both Finland and England reports was directly stated to derive from the implemented reform, thus implying that PISA had proven the successful outcome of the reform.

The assertion that educational reform leads to successful PISA results, and that it is possible to discover the features, which make a “good school” is, as mentioned before, a fundamental part of the OECD and educational effectiveness research logic.¹⁹⁴ In the E&W, this discourse appeared in a guest commentary by the OECD’s PISA director Schleicher, who asserted that a “right mixture” of features made a “good school”.¹⁹⁵ Schleicher declared that the “deficits” in German education system did not imply that the system would have become worse than those of other nations. Instead, he claimed that the OECD indicators had shown how Germany had lacked the “dynamics” with which many other countries had reformed their system.¹⁹⁶ Schleicher’s discourse accorded with the E&W’s attempts to find “answers” in the magazine. Furthermore, his remarks nurtured the arguments in the magazine about the continuous lack of educational reform in Germany since the 1960s school debate.¹⁹⁷ Achim Leschinsky, a German historian of education, made similar diagnoses of the German educational politics later in 2005, when he tried to trace the causes behind what he called the educational “misery”, accusing German education of a continuous lack of reform.¹⁹⁸ Leschinsky’s problem representation resembled that of many E&W articles, which

¹⁹³ See e.g. White, Michael (1999) Blair and Schröder share a vision. *The Guardian*, 9 June 1999. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/1999/jun/09/eu.politics>. Accessed 24 February 2018.

¹⁹⁴ E.g. OECD (2003) *Literacy skills for the world of tomorrow*. Paris: OECD Publishing, 24, 223; see also Reynolds, David, Sammons, Pam, De Fraine, Bieke, Van Damme, Jan, Townsend, Tony, Teddlie, Charles & Stringfield, Sam (2014) Educational effectiveness research (EER): a state-of-the-art review. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 25(2), 197.

¹⁹⁵ Schleicher.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁹⁷ Demmer 2002b; Klemm.

¹⁹⁸ Leschinsky, Achim (2005) Vom Bildungsrat (nach) zu PISA. Eine zeitgeschichtliche Studie zur deutschen Bildungspolitik. *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, 51(6), 818–839.

assumed that continuous educational reform was a desired and normal policy in successful countries.

Further reliance on the OECD voice appeared for instance in Kahl's arguments for changing the macro structure of the education system:

Here the PISA result is quite clear. 'Schools score better in international comparison, the more autonomous they are,' says Andreas Schleicher of the OECD. The well-placed Scandinavian countries have decentralized their traditional centralized systems. All the money goes to the individual schools in Finland and Sweden, including teachers' salaries. The center sets goals in these countries and controls the results. Feedback is part of autonomy. Dialogue is the most important thing. [...] In order to find its own [goal], [the school] has to enter into dialogue with itself.¹⁹⁹

Kahl had therefore accepted Schleicher's message of "autonomous schools" and decentralisation reforms as explaining success. The subtle way how OECD arguments were embedded in comparisons to other countries could be seen for instance in Ratzki and Schumann's remark how English schools had for a long time been "a lot more autonomous" than German schools, although the authors did not mention the OECD in this context.²⁰⁰ Autonomy could be framed in various ways: while Klemm emphasised *pedagogical* autonomy following his perception of the Swedish system, for Kahl autonomy denoted teachers' and schools' *responsibility* over the pupils; thereby, this definition corresponded with his understanding of the deviance in German schools.²⁰¹

Besides autonomy, the OECD discourse highlighted accountability through standardised evaluation measures as a success factor of the leading countries in PISA²⁰². In the PISA details article series, which attempted to explain the data for the readers, it was underlined how top PISA performers already knew national standardised tests and

¹⁹⁹ "Hier ist das PISA-Ergebnis ganz eindeutig. 'Schulen schneiden im internationalen Vergleich umso besser ab, je autonomer sie sind', sagt Andreas Schleicher von der OECD. Die gut platzierten skandinavischen Länder haben ihre traditionell zentralistischen Systeme dezentralisiert. An die einzelnen Schulen in Finnland und Schweden geht das ganze Geld, auch das für Lehrergehälter. Die Zentrale gibt in diesen Ländern Ziele vor und kontrolliert die Ergebnisse. Zur Autonomie gehört Rückmeldung. Dialog ist das allerwichtigste. [...] Um ihren eigenen [Ziel] zu finden, muss sie [die Schule] mit sich selbst in Dialog treten." Kahl 2001b.

²⁰⁰ Ratzki & Schumann, 28.

²⁰¹ Haas-Rietschel, Helga (2002c) Abschied von alten Bildern. E&W 3/2002, 31; Kahl 2001b.

²⁰² See Bieber & Martens.

had implemented them for a long time.²⁰³ Attitudes to steering and standardised tests received equivalent acceptance elsewhere in the E&W, as a researcher Helmut Fend characterised the difference between Germany and countries with a non-tracking school structure:

Countries with comprehensive schools and good performance results have done both: optimal individual support combined with a non-school-based standard assurance via entrance examinations in vocational schools or Gymnasium upper classes, for example, or through cross-school examinations.²⁰⁴

Fend saw the resistance to external achievement control not only within schools but also in the KMK.²⁰⁵ In fact, the time of PISA 2000 was the period when attitudes to standardisation seemed to have gradually changed in Germany, characterised as the empirical turn.²⁰⁶ The KMK had, however, a couple of years earlier in the Konstanzer Beschluss declared that Germany would shift from input to output steering by increasing external evaluation in order to assure quality.²⁰⁷ Apparently this shift had not yet changed how the research community observed the issue so that Fend still had the need to express the lack of achievement standards as a national deficit along with his favourable attitude towards PISA. However, Fend's contemporary experience of fighting against strong resistance to school efficiency research appeared in the educational journalist Kahl's argumentation on behalf of PISA as well.²⁰⁸ This suggests that at the time PISA might have received a positive connotation as a "saviour" also because of this perception of German structural suspicion to external evaluation.

When England's success was analysed, the strong control of school results with tests

²⁰³ van Ackeren 2002c, 20.

²⁰⁴ "Länder mit Gesamtschulen und guten Leistungsergebnissen haben beides getan: eine optimale individuelle Unterstützung kombiniert mit einer schulexternen Standardsicherung über Aufnahmeprüfungen in berufliche oder gymnasiale Oberstufen etwa oder über schulübergreifende Prüfungen." Fend.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Lundahl, Christian & Waldow, Florian (2009) Standardisation and 'quick languages': the shape-shifting of standardised measurement of pupil achievement in Sweden and Germany. *Comparative Education*, 45(3), 365–385.

²⁰⁷ Kultusministerkonferenz (KMK) (1997) Grundsätzliche Überlegungen zu Leistungsvergleichen innerhalb der Bundesrepublik Deutschland – Konstanzer Beschluss. http://www.kmk.org/fileadmin/Dateien/veroeffentlichungen_beschluesse/1997/1997_10_24-Konstanzer-Beschluss.pdf. Accessed 7.11.2017.

²⁰⁸ Kahl 2002a, 21.

and willingness to raise achievement was likewise highlighted.²⁰⁹ Whereas the Finland report highlighted the lack of central testing as part of Finnish success factors, Fend in contrast put Great Britain and Finland under the same category of countries, which unlike Germany based their success on implementing external achievement control.²¹⁰ This further reinforced the impression that these countries were part of an ongoing development of progress.

Highlighting the modernity of successful countries was thus a significant part of the representations. The E&W editor Haas-Rietschel was astonished of the lack of traditional classroom elements in the Swedish school called Futurum, which they had visited.²¹¹ Her emphasis on the school name implied the admiration for these “advanced” didactic principles:

In the 'school of the future' there are no classes, no timetable, no school bell that annoys every 45 minutes, no blackboard, no teacher's desk, no arranged rows of seats.²¹²

Even the architecture of the school was said to be part of the pedagogical programme and to contribute to transparency and to “a new understanding” of teachers’ work.²¹³ In the England report, underlining the high amount of technical equipment and computers in a similar way reinforced the picture of “modern” conditions not only in terms of reformed structure.²¹⁴

3.2 Principles of inclusion and responsibility as success factors

In the Finland article, classroom-related factors were less emphasised than in the Sweden report. Instead, the Finnish “philosophy” of including every child at the system

²⁰⁹ Ratzki & Schumann, 28.

²¹⁰ Holzapfel, 24; Fend.

²¹¹ Haas-Rietschel 2002b.

²¹² “Es gibt in der ‘Schule der Zukunft’ keine Klassen, keinen Studienplan, keine Schulglocke, die im 45-Minuten-Takt nervt, keine Tafel, keinen Lehrerpult, keine angeordneten Sitzreihen.” Haas-Rietschel 2002b, 30.

²¹³ Haas-Rietschel 2002b, 28, 30.

²¹⁴ Ratzki & Schumann.

level was highlighted. England was represented similarly as the forerunner of inclusion, which was said to be the “state goal” in the country. Ratzki and Schumann concentrated on pointing out the exemplary financial resources, which were used to encourage schools to accept “difficult” pupils.²¹⁵ They further described the English system:

In England, schools are *responsible* for the learning progress of their pupils. [...] The performance of individual schools and the results of particular school subjects are published in so-called league tables (ranking lists).²¹⁶

Responsibility therefore became the primary reference in the England report. It is interesting how responsibility was intertwined with the issue of testing culture and publishing ranking lists of school achievement. On the one hand, the authors briefly mentioned that the “rigorous” test system was associated with increased mental problems among pupils. Furthermore, the authors wrote that schools were tempted to form more homogeneous groups by giving easier tests to weaker pupils in order to raise the overall achievement of the school. This sort of “responsibility” over achievement did not, on the other hand, seem to affect at all what Ratzki and Schumann represented as genuine responsibility over the pupils’ individual needs.²¹⁷ Thus, even though such adverse features of the English monitoring culture were in some extent acknowledged, they were not commented any further in the England article or elsewhere in the E&W. This gave an impression that the acknowledgement of the Anglo-Saxon testing culture did not play a role in the overall argumentation, which concentrated on glorifying the New Labour educational politics as a “creative mixture of reform, consequent integration und differentiation”.²¹⁸

However, if compared to the other country reports, there was a clear contradiction in the attitudes towards the ranking culture. Whereas in the England report responsibility equalled with pushing and pressuring by public ranking lists, in the cases of Finland and Sweden quite the opposite arguments were made. Holzapfel emphasised how Finland

²¹⁵ Ratzki & Schumann; Holzapfel.

²¹⁶ “In England sind die Schulen für den Lernfortschritt ihrer Schülerinnen und Schüler *verantwortlich*. [...] In so genannten League tables (Ranking-Listen) werden die Leistungen der einzelnen Schulen und die Ergebnissen einzelner Fächer veröffentlicht.” Ratzki & Schumann, 29. Italics added.

²¹⁷ Ratzki & Schumann.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

had no central testing and that if there should be comparative tests, results would never be public or used to put pressure on schools.²¹⁹ Haas-Rietschel underlined that in Sweden it “will not be attempted with a 'culture of strain' to teach the little ones the multiplication tables as early as possible”.²²⁰ These kind of arguments critically implied that Germany was suffering from an excessive achievement orientation. This could be also seen as a critique towards the KMK, which in 1997 had called for a ‘culture of strain’ (*Kultur der Anstrengung*) after Germany had brought mediocre results from a previous international large-scale assessment, TIMSS.²²¹ These comparisons to Sweden and Finland were clearly inspired by the national disputes.

Although elsewhere in the magazine it seemed that the E&W rather advocated the message, more supportive atmosphere at schools would lead to higher achievement, besides the England report there were other calls for more demanding culture. A conservative Bavarian minister of science Hans Zehetmair who, rather contrastingly to the usual E&W PISA argumentation, explained the PISA results by stating that discipline and achievement had not been valued enough in Germany.²²² Even within the E&W there seemed to be a contradiction between these understandings of which emphasis, support or “pushing” would lead to higher results.

It seemed that the England report in the end attempted to underline that the culture of standardised tests could, nevertheless, be combined with the ideal of support and integration, thus the elements that were the principal values of the GEW.²²³ Thereby it became obvious how the England representation was, although in a different way than the Sweden and Finland accounts, tightly tied to the German context:

All these efforts [in England] *never aim at selection*, but always at inclusion, integrating all children and adolescents. There are some indications that in

²¹⁹ Holzapfel, 24.

²²⁰ “...wird nicht mit einer ‘Kultur der Anstrengung’ versucht, den Kleinen möglichst früh das Einmaleins beizubringen”. Haas-Rietschel 2002b.

²²¹ TIMSS, short for Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study, was conducted by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) in 1995; Kultusministerkonferenz (KMK) (1997) Eine Kultur der Anstrengung entwickeln. Anhörung der KMK 27.6.1997, Bonn. <http://www.kmk.org/aktuelles/artikelansicht/eine-kultur-der-anstrengung-entwickeln.html>. Accessed 5 December 2017.

²²² Endres.

²²³ Ratzki & Schumann.

Germany we are about to adopt forms of accountability from England, centralized examinations and tests, external evaluation, but without the integrative context. In the German selective school system, in contrast, these instruments only lead to increased selection.²²⁴

The citation above indicated that the threats of standardisation movement were also scrutinised critically. This rather diverged from Fend, who earlier represented the standardised steering merely in a positive light. Interestingly enough, despite these signs of critical attitudes, the OECD or PISA assessments were not linked to harmful effects of monitoring at all in my research period in the E&W nor in the England article. In England the standardisation culture was not in the end framed as threatening because of the alleged thorough principle of inclusion.

It seemed that for Ratzki and Schumann the PISA results in England represented an encouraging impulse especially *because* there was something familiar in the English system: in the strict culture of differentiating elements more consistencies could be connected to their own national context. Perhaps that is why a sign of hope was attributed to England and the social democrat New Labour in particular, since they were seen to indicate that a significant break in old structures of continuation was possible. Therefore, the authors could have seen England as providing new arguments to reform the German system at least partially in the situation, where the political *Spielraum* was experienced rather narrow concerning the three-tier structure.

However, what was completely silenced in the case of England was the capability of the PISA results to indicate the reality in this extent. PISA received the role of an indicator of the state of things without further questions. Apparently, the argumentation was based on the perceived German problems, that is, teachers' and schools' irresponsible and ignoring attitudes regarding pupils and their achievement. The representation of England was crystallised in the principle of inclusion by stating that "no school, no

²²⁴ "Alle diese Bemühungen [in England] zielen nie auf Selektion, sondern immer auf Inclusion, Einbeziehung aller Kinder und Jugendlicher. Manches deutet darauf hin, dass wir in Deutschland dabei sind, Formen der Rechenschaftslegung von England zu übernehmen, zentrale Prüfungen und Tests, externe Evaluation, aber ohne den integrativen Kontext. Im deutschen selektiven Schulsystem führen diese Instrumente im Gegenteil nur zu noch mehr Selektion." Ratzki & Schumann, 29. Italics added.

teacher can justify poor performance by having the wrong pupils”.²²⁵ Ratzki and Schumann underlined the English principle of “pushing breaks the circle” merely in the light of responsibility over pupils’ achievement²²⁶. It was the conspicuous emphasis on this aspect that seemed to lead to silencing other issues.

The definition of success was thereby remarkably affected by the representation of national problems. The national “lenses” guided the depiction of Finland in Holzapfel’s article in a similar way: the importance given to the inclusion principle seemed to derive from the need to underline the contrast to the represented German conditions, where the fear that a child is “in a ‘wrong’ school” was presented to be the prevailing philosophy.²²⁷ This represented deficit of the German system thereby resembled the same “homogeneity paradigm” discussed in the previous chapter.

What was remarkable here was how it seemed that the national gaze was able to shift attention away from the unintended effects of the ranking culture in England. After all, Ratzki and Schumann did briefly mention effects such as pupils’ mental problems and the pressure schools had to raise their ranking position. In fact, researchers have found evidence that the increased performance measuring has led to schools behaving strategically. For example, schools have targeted resources on certain pupils at the cost of other pupils, and in some cases selected out pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds. Another criticism is that the pressure leads to “teaching to the test” which might narrow down the curricula.²²⁸ The fact that Ratzki and Schumann acknowledged these issues but then left them untouched suggests a selective way of examining the country comparisons. As Bacchi points out, leaving certain issues unproblematic may limit the discussion of the topic.²²⁹

²²⁵ “Keine Schule, kein Lehrer kann schlechte Leistungen damit begründen, die falschen Schülerinnen und Schüler zu haben.” Ratzki & Schumann, 28.

²²⁶ Ratzki & Schumann, 29.

²²⁷ “der Angst davor, dass ein Kind auf der ‘falschen’ Schule sei”. Holzapfel, 25.

²²⁸ West & Pennell 2000; West, Anne (2010) High stakes testing, accountability, incentives and consequences in English schools. *Policy & Politics*, 38(1), 23–39; Leckie, George & Goldstein, Harvey (2017) The evolution of school league tables in England 1992–2016: ‘Contextual value-added’, ‘expected progress’ and ‘progress 8’. *British Educational Research Journal*, 43(2), 193–212.

²²⁹ Bacchi, 12–14, 263.

3.3 The gap between Germany and the successful countries

The national view seemed in general to be the filter through which other countries were perceived. In the Finland report this became obvious in the way Holzapfel rather haphazardly noted:

Of course, there is no culture of grade retention. Nothing seems as absurd in Helsinki as the German conviction, that grade retention would be a pedagogical measure. Germany is famously the absolute world champion of grade retention.²³⁰

The PISA results had also revealed that grade retention was particularly common in Germany. As this was one of the aspects of the German system that the GEW argued against leaning on the PISA results²³¹, Holzapfel's comparison gave again the impression that attention was given to features, which were experienced to be the most severe deficits in the authors' national context. Besides describing the structural features of the foreign system, Holzapfel's comparison thus focused on the polemic issues from the German context, and highlighted the distance between the national situation and the "successful" countries.

In the Swedish case the experience of the German deficits alike seemed to have an effect on how it was argued about the success factors in the foreign country. Haas-Rietschel suggested that Swedish teachers had an extraordinary enthusiasm for change:

Swedish educators keep saying goodbye to their old concepts over and over again and are ready to design new pictures about learning and teaching.²³²

Haas-Rietschel's Sweden representation now attributed to teachers a similar reform capacity that earlier had been ascribed to all three foreign systems. The journalist Kahl drew a corresponding contrast between the values and attitudes in Sweden and

²³⁰ "Selbstverständlich gibt es auch kein Sitzenbleiben. Nichts erscheint einem in Helsinki so absurd wie die deutsche Überzeugung, beim Sitzenbleiben handele es sich um eine pädagogische Massnahme. Deutschland ist bekanntlich beim Sitzenbleiben absoluter Weltmeister." Holzapfel, 24.

²³¹ See e.g. Demmer 2002a.

²³² "...dass sich schwedische Pädagogen immer wieder von ihren alten Konzepten verabschieden, und bereit sind, neue Bilder über Lernen und Lehren zu entwerfen." Haas-Rietschel 2002c.

Germany:

In which German schools was the motto "Love and Consequences", which was heard at the Bäckhagens Skola in Stockholm?²³³

This argument, again, began with interpreting other countries in contrast to the perceived German problems. The comparison was based on a deep conviction, that German schools would fundamentally differ from other countries not only in their educational models but also in their deeper mentality and values.

Haas-Rietschel stated that the school introduced in the Sweden report would give back the belief in the general concept of schooling.²³⁴ At the same time, however, she mentioned how the school in question was a specific project school, following pedagogy that ten percent of Swedish schools had started to apply.²³⁵ Therefore, it seemed that whereas German schools were treated as an imagined collective entity based on the PISA scores, the understanding of success abroad could be based on single examples without much notice to contextual factors or the overall picture.

At the same time, however, it was more complex than that. Paying attention to the fact that the model Swedish school represented ten percent of Swedish schools did not seem to prevent Haas-Rietschel from giving the impression that Swedish education in total represented this ideal as a contrast to the German culture. Representations stating that successful countries believed “in the willingness of people to learn”²³⁶ or that the Swedes had “understood that learning is a highly individual and personal matter”²³⁷ generalised their claims across the whole Swedish educational society. While references to single schools thus gave the impression that conclusions were drawn from a rather narrow basis, the simultaneous broad generalisations reinforced the insistent image of Sweden as a model example. Sweden had in fact been called a “*Musterland*” in the

²³³ “An welchen deutschen Schulen lautete das Motto schon “Love and Consequences”, das sich an der Bäckhagens Skola in Stockholm hörte?” Kahl 2001b.

²³⁴ Haas-Rietschel 2002b, 30.

²³⁵ Ibid.

²³⁶ Kahl 2001b.

²³⁷ Editorial. E&W 3/2002, 3.

E&W editorial already in the November issue in 2001 before the PISA results had been published.²³⁸

In the E&W Sweden was altogether treated as the mythical “*Bildungswunderland*” where the E&W editorial expected the “secret of learning” to be discovered²³⁹. By representing Swedish education as following a “Pippi Longstocking principle” Haas-Rietschel drew a mythical picture of pedagogy that encouraged the child to individual fantasy, obstinacy and willingness to experiment. The wilfulness of the “Pippi principle” seemed to function for the author not only as a model for child upbringing, but also as an encouragement to resist the prevailing traditional conservative boundaries of German school structure. The fact that the main reference of the Sweden report was a headstrong fairy tale character – the picture of Pippi illustrated three articles discussing Swedish education and educational politics – gives an idea to what extent PISA data played a role in the overall argumentation.²⁴⁰ Still, the glance at Sweden was initially justified with “results”, as the editorial of the issue introduced the Sweden report:

Traveling educates. In any way the [...] GEW trip to Sweden has convinced even the most persistent doubters: school without selection is possible and — as the results reveal — also better.²⁴¹

It was not, however, specified, to which results they referred. Even though rankings and “peak positions” in PISA seemingly justified for the E&W authors the treatment of Finland and England in particular, Swedish PISA scores were only relatively good and not among the highest ranked countries²⁴². Nevertheless, for instance the researcher Klemm did not refrain from referring to Swedish “peak values” (*Spitzenwerte*)²⁴³. The image of the Swedish peak position could have derived from earlier large-scale assessment, TIMSS results, which Kahl mentioned when discussing Sweden²⁴⁴. If this were the case, it would be peculiar that the more moderate results from the PISA study

²³⁸ Editorial. E&W 11/2001, 3.

²³⁹ Haas-Rietschel 2002b, 28–29; Editorial. E&W 3/2002, 3.

²⁴⁰ Haas-Rietschel 2002b; Haas-Rietschel 2002c.

²⁴¹ “Reisen bildet. Jedenfalls hat die [...] GEW-Reise mit Bildungsjournalisten nach Schweden selbst hartknäckige Zweifler überzeugt: Schule ohne Selektion ist doch möglich und — wie Ergebnisse offenbaren — auch besser.” Editorial. E&W 3/2002, 3.

²⁴² OECD (2001) Knowledge and skills for life. Paris: OECD Publications, 53, 79, 88.

²⁴³ Klemm.

²⁴⁴ Kahl 2002a, 21.

received no remarks. It would not have quite fitted into the existing picture of Sweden. Evidently there was no need to justify the superiority of Swedish education or further examine the Swedish PISA results, since the conceptualisation of Swedish superiority was on a sufficiently steady basis. The image of Sweden in the E&W could be explained with the longer tendency in Germany to conceive Sweden as an educational model and more generally, as a societal model especially on the part of social democrats²⁴⁵.

Waldow has observed that the German focus turned from Sweden to Finland after the PISA study,²⁴⁶ but apparently this shift had not yet occurred within the E&W during the research period of this thesis. This shows how PISA rankings at this point only in a selective way determined the “reference societies”²⁴⁷ of the GEW, and Sweden could retain its position as the familiar point of reference. Confirming what Waldow has stated earlier about the selective reference to international models at a national level, references to successful countries in the E&W thus signalled how the definitions of being on the top could vary between the PISA ranking lists and earlier connotations²⁴⁸.

In this case, the representation of Sweden was based on already existing convictions. Consequently, these comparisons made within the PISA discussion had very little to do with drawing conclusions with PISA data or even with PISA rankings in the case of Sweden. Based on this, seeking for answers from abroad was not framed explicitly as a *consequence* of PISA. Instead, PISA seemed to have the role of stimulating the search for solutions in the first place. The inconsistency on the matter was only that it seemed to justify some arguments better than others.

Other articles in the E&W did not always specifically mention PISA either when they referred to “success” or “evidence” of integrated systems working “intelligently” with heterogeneous groups.²⁴⁹ A sufficient reference to other countries’ success could be an unnamed “study”, as in Felix Winter’s travel report, where he recommended a

²⁴⁵ See Waldow 2010a, 497–498.

²⁴⁶ Waldow 2010a, 497–498.

²⁴⁷ See Sellar & Lingard 2013; Schriewer, Jürgen & Martinez, Carlos (2004) *Constructions of Internationality in Education*, In Steiner-Khamisi, Gita (ed.) *The Global Politics of Educational Borrowing and Lending*. New York: Teachers College Press, 29–53.

²⁴⁸ Waldow 2010a, 499.

²⁴⁹ E.g. Schnell & Kehl, 26.

“successful” portfolio method used in a few US schools as a remedy to the German strict grading system and to challenges with heterogeneous groups of pupils. Winter invoked the “lessons” Germany had received from PISA in his pleading to implement the portfolio method instead of normal exams. However, the concept of “evidence” in Winter’s argumentation had nothing to do with PISA data, although the report was framed as part of the first “practical conclusions” from PISA.²⁵⁰ This example showed again, how non-specific argumentation in the E&W could be framed as a “consequence of PISA”.

The way of suggesting that Germany radically differed from the successful countries also reached the representation of the political landscape between countries. After a discussion with different parties and stakeholders of Swedish education, Karl-Heinz Heinemann, a journalist who also participated in the GEW trip to Sweden, perceived the Swedish politics as follows:

*No one of our discussion partners seriously disputes that much is being done for education in this country. There is no ideological sharpness that characterises the topic in our country. It is a good thing that there is a school for all, and it is also good that everyone here could achieve his goal...*²⁵¹

He was thereby convinced that there was a profound difference between Swedish and German political cultures. Through this Sweden reference, Heinemann represented his own national context as a hopeless battle against political adversaries, who were opposing the values of education and equality. Holzapfel’s characterisation of Finnish culture of school politics had similar tones:

It is a coalition of reason. No professional association demands for more instruction time for their subject, no minister of education calls for more obligatory presence hours for teachers.²⁵²

²⁵⁰ Winter, 22, 27.

²⁵¹ “Von unseren Diskussionspartnern *bestreitet niemand ernsthaft*, dass in diesem Land viel für die Bildung getan wird. *Es fehlt die ideologische Schärfe*, die das Thema bei uns hat. Es sei gut so, dass es eine Schule für alle gebe, und es sei auch gut, dass jeder hier sein Ziel erreichen könne...” Heinemann, Karl-Heinz (2002a) Wissen und Liebe – Bildung Top-Thema im schwedischen Wahlkampf. E&W 3/2002, 32. Italics added.

²⁵² “Es ist eine Koalition der Vernunft. Kein Fachverband ruft nach mehr Stunden für sein Fach, kein Kultusminister nach mehr Pflichtstunden für Lehrer.” Holzapfel, 24.

Holzapfel's Finland report accounted the Finnish success for "the coalition of reason", as the whole article was headed. Heinemann's and Holzapfel's representations had something in common: they contrasted "reason" in successful countries with "ideological" when referring to the German debate in educational politics. Consequently, they gave a very context-free representation of foreign educational systems and silenced the possibility of any conflicts occurring in those countries. Since PISA was represented as the voice of "truth", there seemed to be no need to question the existing interpretations of other countries' political contexts, as PISA had already stated the "success".

These citations were examples of a common argumentation style in the E&W, which implied that ideological conflicts did not exist in successful countries. Further examples of such a representation were remarks on how the successful countries were dealing with heterogeneous ability groups in an "intelligent" way. This statement seemed to gain strength from assertions provided by OECD experts.²⁵³

The perceived problem in Germany, the fixation on homogeneous learning groups, was again represented as the distinctive element of the German political and societal landscape. This was visible for instance in pleas stating that the question of heterogeneous learning should be discussed completely in a "non-ideological" way.²⁵⁴ In the E&W, ideological was thereby used to describe the political opposition.²⁵⁵ This accords with Bellmann's observations of the German "protagonists" of educational reforms, who tended to contrast their arguments as "pragmatic" against the "ideological" reform discussion in the 1960s and 1970s. The negativity of anything 'ideological' was clear, only Bellmann has pointed out that pragmatic did not always have positive connotations in German discourse.²⁵⁶ Therefore it seemed that PISA had contributed to this conceptual shift.

²⁵³ Schnell & Kehl, 26; Welzel, Steffen 2002a.

²⁵⁴ Diehl 2002b, 9.

²⁵⁵ Heinemann 2002a; Diehl 2002b, 9.

²⁵⁶ Bellmann 2007, 422.

3.4 Solutions according to the international development

Besides the lack of tracking, several explanations for success highlighted that most other countries had “all-day schooling” (*Ganztagsschule*) unlike Germany. The aspect of all-day schools being the common form of school in Sweden was also not forgotten in the Sweden travel report.²⁵⁷ The researcher Klemm drew a picture of the reality of different school systems within Europe:

That is the way it is. In the group of EU countries [...] Greece, Austria and Germany offer the half-day school, Italy and Portugal lead half-day and all-day schools side by side and all other EU countries have all-day schools as regular schools.²⁵⁸

The way of talking about all-day schools in the E&W implied an assumption that outside Germany schools would be divided to either half-day or all-day schools, without considering possible variations in the understanding and background of this concept in other countries. Implying that everywhere else all-day schooling was normality reinforced the overall representation of Germany lying behind internationally. Already in the initial reactions of the E&W December issue it was stated that the “PISA authors” had advised Germany to “catch up with the common international standard” of all-day schooling, so that Germany could raise its average achievement scores.²⁵⁹ Thereby the OECD was given a legitimating role in the argument that Germany ought to act fast in this matter.

In the nationwide PISA discourse, increasing all-day schooling had a significant role as one of the main consequences of PISA, as it had been set by the *Länder* Ministers of Education in the KMK right after the publication of the results as part of the political measures to implement²⁶⁰. It was framed in public as the solution to narrow the achievement gap based on socioeconomic differences in Germany.²⁶¹ However,

²⁵⁷ Haas-Rietschel 2002b, 28–29.

²⁵⁸ “So ist es. In der Gruppe der EU-Länder [...] bieten Griechenland, Österreich und Deutschland die Halbtagschule, Italien und Portugal führen Halb- und Ganztagschulen nebeneinander und alle übrigen EU-Länder haben Ganztagschulen als Regelschulen.” Welzel, Steffen 2001b, 12.

²⁵⁹ Ibid.

²⁶⁰ KMK 2002, 6–7.

²⁶¹ Tillmann et al., 383.

Tillmann et al. have managed to show that Ganztagsschule had been partially on the agenda already before PISA discussion. Tillmann et al. have additionally argued that Ganztagsschule was accepted by the public and politicians not because of empirically proven value of it but rather due to the public conception according to which Ganztagsschule was a proper way to respond to the PISA results. The fact that the concept of Ganztagsschule had convinced the public was more important than any empirical evidence of it. Tillmann et al. conclude that the pressure that politicians had to act fast played a significant role in the process of legitimating the concept.²⁶²

In the E&W, the perception of Ganztagsschulen as an appropriate reaction to PISA followed a similar pattern. Heinemann even called Ganztagsschulen the “charm” (*Zauberformel*) that would solve all problems, the low PISA-results among other things. Although the research material indicated that the E&W authors had also acknowledged the national “consensus” that had developed itself around all-day schooling, they still seemed to have the need to argue further for it.²⁶³ Heinemann claimed that all-day schooling would lead to a “new quality” of schooling and drew legitimation from Sweden:

It is confirmed by the Swedish experiences, which Agneta Anderlund from the Swedish Lärarvörbundet reported: The entire school work has changed: now the teachers have fixed attendance time of 35 hours per week at school. And they have learned to accompany each student [...] individually in their development.²⁶⁴

With the quote above Heinemann gave the impression, Sweden had recently gone through an equal reform transforming schools into “all-day schools”.²⁶⁵ He implied that a system level change to an all-day concept would change teachers’ working methods towards the concept of individual support. Apparently Heinemann expected a natural chain of development, where Germany would now follow Sweden. In the Finland

²⁶² Tillmann, et al. 264–270; Waldow 2010b, 479.

²⁶³ Heinemann, Karl-Heinz (2002c) Zwischen Horror und Vision – Ganztagsschule. Wahlkampfthema und Zauberformel? E&W 4/2002, 18.

²⁶⁴ “Bestätigt wird es durch die schwedischen Erfahrungen, die Agneta Anderlund vom schwedischen Lärarvörbundet berichtete: Die ganze Schularbeit hat sich verändert: Nun haben die Lehrer dort feste Anwesenheitszeiten von 35 Wochenstunden in der Schule. Und sie haben gelernt, jeden Schüler [...] individuell in ihrer Entwicklung zu begleiten.” Heinemann 2002c.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

report, Holzapfel also tried in his argumentation for a comprehensive school system to draw parallels in the historical development of both countries by pointing out that Finland had had a similar selective system until the 1970s. He stated that where Finland had succeeded, Germany had “failed”.²⁶⁶ Thus, Holzapfel implied that both countries would have been in a similar course of development, where in the end there would exist winners and losers.

The educational journalist Kahl drew similar conclusions of how other countries such as Canada or Scandinavians had “taken the risk to remove the fear out of the system and invest in trust...”²⁶⁷ With this Kahl implied that other countries would have suffered from similar problems as the systematic “fear” that Kahl perceived to be embedded in the German system. Assuming that other countries conceived the problems similarly as the E&W commentators was a common pattern in the magazine. Demmer, for instance, claimed that teachers throughout the world saw heterogeneous teaching groups as the biggest problem of their work.²⁶⁸

If these patterns of argumentation are analysed in the light of Koselleck’s understanding of temporality between the experience and expectation, one can discern the tension between the experienced history of education and the expectations of desired outcomes. In the previous subchapter I showed how the German tradition and national experience was represented to intrinsically differ from successful countries. Conversely, it was now implied that all countries including Germany had undergone an equivalent phase in their educational history with similar challenges. Through this representation it was seemingly further underlined that the German course of history had taken a false turn.

Common for these representations was the need to depict a historical development of certain events and assume that these had determined outcomes. For Holzapfel, Kahl and Heinemann among others this seemed to be an attempt to make things appear possible: the conditions could be or could have been something else. Leaning on Spector and Kitsuse’s theory, the availability of remedies in other contexts as the basis of problem

²⁶⁶ Holzapfel.

²⁶⁷ “...haben es riskiert, Angst aus dem System zu nehmen und Vertrauen zu investieren.” Kahl 2001b.

²⁶⁸ Demmer 2002c, 17.

constructions generated dissatisfaction and simultaneously hopes for these actors.²⁶⁹ The OECD's arguments for the goals of PISA in a similar manner increased the appeal of comparison by asserting that PISA shows what is *possible* in education²⁷⁰. For the E&W commentators above, the perceived possibilities revealed by PISA thus shaped the expectations. In this way, international comparison had the function of widening the horizon of potential futures. There seemed to be a need to illustrate continuities: the commentators attempted to reduce the gap between present and past experience and the horizon of expectations.

In the Finland report Holzapfel expected that since the Finnish PISA scores in reading literacy were high, the Finns had previously put particular weight on language competence in their system. Heinemann noted in another article how the Swedes had not given attention to PISA until it was stated that Swedish PISA scores were low in the area of "discipline", after which the Swedes then realised that "something must be done" in that sector.²⁷¹ These assumptions strengthened the impression that rational determined planning would contribute to high PISA results. What is more striking, this implied the expectation that each country would and should make political decisions according to the PISA rankings.

Thus, it became increasingly clear that successful education systems in the E&W were mostly interpreted through a taken-for-granted attitude to PISA. Within the academic discussion of comparative education, critical educational researchers such as Simola et al. have demanded that contingency and possible historical coincidences behind the development of education systems should be taken into account when comparing systems²⁷². Based on my research material it seems that such awareness was hardly present in the PISA discussions of the E&W at the time.

Sellar and Lingard have observed an interesting pattern in the international reactions to PISA: even countries leading the rankings have had the need to make changes according to the PISA data. This demonstrates the ascendancy that PISA has in defining the

²⁶⁹ See Spector & Kitsuse, 84.

²⁷⁰ OECD (2004) What makes school systems perform? Seeing school systems through the prism of PISA. Paris: OECD Publishing, 3.

²⁷¹ Holzapfel, 24–25; Heinemann 2002a.

²⁷² Simola et al., 612–614.

“educational race”.²⁷³ Heinemann’s reportage in the E&W of the Swedish system provided an example of such a tendency, when he underlined that even a “successful” country such as Sweden was improving its system according to the PISA guidance. This reinforced the impression that the E&W discussions offered in this subchapter: it was expected that PISA should guide all education systems, including those already perceived as successful. In other words, PISA was given the power of defining, which education policies were required. This indicated an experience of urgency created by the PISA results. The E&W’s discussion showed signs of crisis rhetoric similar to what critical researchers such as Gorur, Auld and Morris have observed in the argumentation surrounding PISA²⁷⁴.

3.5 The peculiar search for causalities

While it has become clear that the discussion in the E&W focused on searching for causes for “success”, with which the magazine commonly referred to PISA as a yardstick, it did not seem to be a unified pattern of argumentation. Simultaneously there existed rather conflicting patterns of argumentation in the attempts to examine the PISA results: the GEW-minded arguments tended to draw direct conclusions that PISA had proved the flaws of the three-tier system, while statistical experts and researchers stayed cautious of such claims. In June, the GEW’s Demmer argued directly that “perhaps the Finns are successful exactly because they teach all children together.”²⁷⁵ There was thus a tendency to keep on referring to causal effects even half a year after the publication of the results, despite the fact that the complexities of PISA data had been acknowledged as well.

In contrast, where researchers and PISA experts were interviewed or PISA data was analysed in the E&W,²⁷⁶ the researchers continuously stated how PISA could not provide evidence of school structure having a causal effect on achievement. Researchers such as Klaus-Jürgen Tillmann and Klaus Klemm started with remarking that PISA

²⁷³ Sellar & Lingard 2013, 470.

²⁷⁴ Gorur; Auld & Morris.

²⁷⁵ “Vielleicht sind die Finnen ja deshalb so erfolgreich, gerade weil sie alle Kinder gemeinsam unterrichten.” Demmer 2002c, 16.

²⁷⁶ See the PISA Details series: Welzel, Steffen 2002b, 23; Ballauf 2002a, 26; van Ackeren 2002a; van Ackeren 2002b; van Ackeren 2002c.

could not provide causal inferences but moved directly after that to statements that PISA, nevertheless, indicated that German early tracking would differ from all top PISA performers in their comprehensive systems.²⁷⁷ Tillmann pointed out:

... we are the country that is the earliest to track pupils within the structured school system - and we are far behind with our performance. Especially concerning the poor achievement results, we have a particularly sharp social selection with our Hauptschule. *All this indicates that there is also a school system effect.* Incidentally, the OECD sees the same way.²⁷⁸

Indeed, the most often cited OECD voice in E&W, the PISA director Schleicher, followed a similar pattern of argumentation, such as in the following interview:

[Welzel:] So are integrated systems more performance-capable? [Schleicher:] Even though causal relationships are difficult to determine here, there is a tendency for integrative school systems [...] to show better overall performance. [...] Decisions should therefore not be set and institutionalized too early.²⁷⁹

Despite his straightforward arguments beginning with “PISA shows that...”, Schleicher’s diplomatic style concentrated on pointing out correlations of rather vague thematic points such as school climate and school autonomy.²⁸⁰ In contrast to Schleicher’s argumentation, which clearly accorded with the GEW-minded political opinions about early tracking as seen in the above quotation, the other interviewed PISA expert, the German PISA coordinator Jürgen Baumert had a different tone. He refrained from giving in to the E&W editor Welzel’s leading questions about the linkage of success and integrated structure. Baumert seemed to insist that the early tracking of the German system was an existing feature, an “unlucky matter”, with which one must learn to cope with by developing new didactic concepts. Moreover, Baumert’s rhetoric was more complex and technical, whereas Schleicher’s arguments appeared more

²⁷⁷ Welzel, Steffen 2002b; Welzel, Steffen 2001b, 12.

²⁷⁸ “...sind wir das Land, das im Rahmen des gegliederten Schulsystems am frühesten aussortiert – und wir liegen mit unseren Leistungen weit hinten. Insbesondere im Bereich der schwachen Leistungen haben wir mit unserer Hauptschule eine besonders scharfe soziale Auslese. *Dies alles verweist darauf, dass es auch einen Schulsystemeffekt gibt.* Die OECD sieht das übrigens genauso.” Welzel, Steffen 2002b, 24. Italics added.

²⁷⁹ “[Welzel:] Also sind integrierte Systeme leistungsfähiger? [Schleicher:] Obwohl auch hier kausale Zusammenhänge schwer zu ermitteln sind, *zeigt sich tendenziell*, dass integrative Schulsysteme [...] bessere Gesamtleistungen [...] aufweisen. [...] Entscheidungen dürfen deshalb nicht zu früh festgelegt und institutionalisiert werden.” Welzel, Steffen 2002a, 22. Italics added.

²⁸⁰ Welzel, Steffen 2002a, 22–24.

generalising and thus appealing. Baumert stated that among countries tracking early there were both those with good and those with weaker PISA results.²⁸¹ He did not specify, which countries had those good results. Interestingly enough, the GEW-minded researcher Klaus Klemm had denied exactly this argument in the previous issue: for Klemm, PISA finally belied this mantra-like certainty.²⁸² Again it was thus visible, how much the interpretations of the PISA results could differ. Still, it was rather peculiar that Baumert's direct statement did not seem to weaken the GEW's insistence on the ability of PISA to prove their resistance to the three-tier system throughout the magazine. In other words, Baumert's expertise or the statement itself was not put under question but was completely silenced.

The fact that the interview of Schleicher and Baumert was headed "Successful Countries have Integrated Systems" despite both interviewees denying causal connections was criticised by a reader, who accused the E&W of incompetence and intentional contorting the opinion of the interviewees.²⁸³ The existence of the GEW's political line concerning the structure question in the E&W provoked other readers to criticise the active school politics of the GEW as well²⁸⁴. The indignation of the reader demonstrated the complexity of statistical expertise colliding with political opinions: in a way the experts' statements and PISA results gave a reason both to name the interview as it was named, and also to draw critical attention to the contradiction. Paying attention to the "integrated" school system model of top PISA performers did not yet claim that the model itself would lead to success. This demonstrates the way that PISA could function in contradictory arguments.

On the other hand, one could distinguish a political objective in many of the E&W articles, since arguing for the goal of comprehensive system was visible across the E&W material. Separating correlation and causality may thus become equivocal in debates where technical and political argumentation mingles. This showed how the OECD expertise seemed to provide legitimation both for those arguing for the abolition

²⁸¹ Welzel, Steffen 2002a.

²⁸² Welzel, Steffen 2001b, 12.

²⁸³ Heyde, Phillipp (2002) Widerspruch. E&W 4/2002, 41.

²⁸⁴ Dierks, Holger (2002) Wunde. E&W 2/2002, 40; Retaiski, Egon (2002) Zweitrangig. E&W 5/2002, 34.

of the tracking structure and for those denying the effect of school structure and early tracking.

The complex nature of translating PISA data into practice became even more obvious in the attempts of the E&W to provide detailed analysis of the findings in their series of “PISA-Details” in four issues with the help of school development researcher Isabell van Ackeren.²⁸⁵ The series was introduced as follows:

The PISA results are one thing, their explanation and the search for causes the other. On the 532 pages of the national study there are a number of detailed findings and correlations that are relevant to the understanding of PISA outcomes, their international positioning and the search for solutions to problems.²⁸⁶

This attempt certainly showed that the E&W endeavoured to not merely examine the rankings in order to understand the PISA results. Still, the extent to which this interest in data and the attempt to explain the 532 pages actually changed anything in how the league tables affected the initial PISA reactions and the usage of PISA in the GEW argumentation leaves one to doubt. It is unlikely that these details would have contributed to teachers’ understanding of the PISA results. For instance, detailed comparisons of the PISA results, which measured the impact of homework, instruction time or external tutoring on achievement in different countries seemed to merely end in vague conclusions such as the following:

Despite all the reservations regarding the data situation, the presented results may still possibly indicate an effect on the learning outcome by the factor ‘time’.²⁸⁷

Although the objective of analysing the PISA data with an expert probably was to

²⁸⁵ Welzel, Steffen 2002b, 23; Ballauf 2002a, 26; van Ackeren 2002a; van Ackeren 2002b; van Ackeren 2002c.

²⁸⁶ “Die PISA-Ergebnisse sind das eine, ihre Erklärung und die Ursachenforschung das andere. Hierzu finden sich auf den 532 Seiten der nationalen Studie eine Vielzahl von Detailerkenntnissen und –zusammenhängen, die für das Verständnis der PISA-Resultate, ihre internationale Einordnung und die Suche nach Problemlösungen von Bedeutung sind.” Welzel, Steffen 2002b, 23.

²⁸⁷ “Die referierten Ergebnisse sprechen – trotz aller Vorbehalte im Hinblick auf die Datenlage – möglicherweise doch für einen Einfluss auf den Lernertrag durch den Faktor ‘Zeit’.” van Ackeren 2002c, 20.

increase transparency about the PISA results to a non-technician audience of educational workers, this kind of analyses have been likely to leave the readers rather confused exactly as in the case of the OECD experts' causality arguments. Accordingly, the PISA Details articles emphasised how PISA would not transmit causal relations but mere hypotheses.²⁸⁸ Moreover, van Ackeren's article reminded the readers of the fact that the OECD and the national report did not recommend changing the structure of the tracking systems, exactly as Baumert had implied in his interview.²⁸⁹ The complexities of statistical expertise combined with the layman urgency to "find answers" within the GEW thereby led to a peculiar combination of arguments side by side.

To a certain extent, the inclusion of conflicting arguments in the E&W gave an impression that the discussion within the GEW included multiple aspects despite the otherwise rather one-sided argumentation on the tracking issue. In other words, the magazine highlighted the "scientific" approach on the matter and let contradictory stances coexist. However, there seemed to be no discussion between these two opposing stands or comments on the contrasting expert opinions, although PISA expertise was at the same time framed to buttress the arguments of the GEW. The existence of scientific, more cautious arguments did not lessen the more simplified GEW argumentation. In other words, the contradictory elements of the discussion were completely ignored.

However, the tendency of making causal inferences with PISA caused criticism outside the E&W discussion among educational researchers. Johannes Bellmann and another German educationist, Ewald Terhart, warned of the hasty policy conclusions drawn from the PISA data. According to Terhart, it was not at all possible to infer the causes for the PISA results from the data.²⁹⁰ Bellmann has pointed out the same ambiguous tendency in Schleicher and Baumert's argumentation, that was visible in the E&W material: even they as experts do not seem to agree on what can be suggested based on PISA. In the E&W sources, the research voices tended to deny causality but in the next sentence, as Bellmann has stated, provided policy recommendations stating "PISA,

²⁸⁸ van Ackeren 2002b.

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰ Terhart, Ewald (2003) Was bewirken Leistungsvergleichsstudien in der Schule – und was können sie bewirken? In Hansel, Toni (ed.) *Pisa – und die Folgen? Die Wirkung von Leistungsvergleichsstudien in der Schule*. Herbolzheim: Centaurus-Verlag, 31–33.

however, does show...”²⁹¹ In the magazine this pattern was framed to strengthen the plausibility of certain political arguments, such as comprehensive schooling and appealing governments to reform education. The given prominence to statistical expertise eventually functioned as a rhetorical device, regardless of whether the authors and interviewees consciously intended to do so.

The fact that the PISA analysis in the magazine naturally attempted to lean on expertise and researchers in its urgency to discover causes for PISA results made visible the inescapable conflict between opposing political camps. Secondly, the combination of contradicting arguments illustrated the complexity of the dialogue between research knowledge and political matters. Lundahl and Waldow have drawn attention to the fact that psychometric studies are characterised by methodological complexities, which require a great amount of prior knowledge that most educational actors do not have. They, however, point out that it is not the psychometric science as such creating a “quick language” (Lundahl 2008) within educational discourse.²⁹² The material analysed here suggests that the dialogue between psychometric research and political struggles indeed suffers from serious flaws.

There were no signs of change in this pattern even later in 2002. After the German national supplement tests, the PISA-E results, were published in summer 2002 the GEW utilised the causality statement as part of their article, where they went through “claims” against “facts” about PISA studies.

Neither the international nor the national PISA study allow for causal inferences from the school system to student performance. The assertion that the German Sonderweg of early performance selection has proved to be superior to integrated systems is refuted by PISA.²⁹³

Thus, the causality argument was in a peculiar way turned upside down and used against the political opposition. In contrast, the stance of the GEW was now presented

²⁹¹ Bellmann 2007, 424.

²⁹² Lundahl & Waldow, 366.

²⁹³ “Weder die international noch die nationale Pisa-Studie lassen kausale Rückschlüsse vom Schulsystem auf Schülerleistungen zu. Die Behauptung, der deutsche Sonderweg der frühen Leistungsselektion habe sich als gegenüber integrierten Systemen als überlegen erwiesen, ist durch Pisa widerlegt.” Der erste und der zweite Blick - Eine erste Analyse der Ergebnisse. E&W 7–8/2002, 11–12.

to be on the side of the experts, who had refrained from making causal claims.

3.6 The effects of the national PISA-E results on the teacher discussion

As mentioned before, the German educational system is fundamentally affected by the fact that the country is divided into 16 *Bundesländer*, who have strong autonomy especially considering their school politics.²⁹⁴ The publication of the additional national PISA-E results in summer 2002 enabled comparing *Länder* with each other. This caused an intensive discussion in the E&W as it had done at the public level due to the federal elections in September 2002.²⁹⁵

The difficulty in the PISA-E results for the GEW was to respond to the “irritating” result: the most conservative and selective state of Bavaria scored highest of all *Länder*, whereas Bremen scored the lowest, although educational expenses per pupil were the highest in Bremen. Immediately, the E&W accepted the German PISA expert Jürgen Baumert’s characterisation of the results: according to him, Bavarian results located Bavaria as “the so-called Bremen of Canada”. Canada had been one of the high performers in the international PISA tests but had variation between provinces. Baumert’s statement therefore implied that Bavarian high results were comparable with the lowest scoring Canadian provinces. In the E&W framing of PISA-E, Baumert’s words transformed into highlighting that in the “OECD comparison” Bavaria was “only the ‘Bremen’ of Canada” and thus “not *Spitze*”²⁹⁶. It seemed that with small phrasings the representation of the Bavarian scores received a slightly depreciating tone, although the statistics presented in the head article could have provided quite different conclusions: apparently the E&W at least did not merely look at PISA score points, since the presented average scores between Bavaria and Sweden were relatively near each other.²⁹⁷ This is interesting particularly because the PISA scores of the international comparison, as we have seen so far, had not been called under question.

²⁹⁴ Ertl, 622.

²⁹⁵ Tillmann et al., 19, 44.

²⁹⁶ Ballauf, Helga (2002d) Bayern – das Bremen Kanadas. E&W 7–8/2002, 6; Der erste und der zweite Blick - Eine erste Analyse der Ergebnisse. E&W 7–8/2002, 11–12.

²⁹⁷ Der erste und der zweite Blick - Eine erste Analyse der Ergebnisse. E&W 7–8/2002, 11–12.

Additionally, Baumert had stated that one should not search for role models within Germany but instead in Scandinavian or Anglo-Saxon countries.²⁹⁸ Baumert's diagnosis seemed to fit the earlier GEW representation of Germany playing in another league compared to other industrial countries. Apparently the argumentation in the magazine could still rely on Baumert's expertise despite his earlier refutation of German tracking system explaining the results. After all, his recommendation of gazing at international role models agreed with the GEW discourse.

Although the educational journalist Kahl kept searching for didactic or system explanations for PISA-E by referring to Bavarian authoritative teaching style and connecting this to what according to him German schools needed, "autonomy" and individualism,²⁹⁹ in the overall argumentation of the E&W the PISA-E caused an argumentative shift. The analyses of the PISA-E results written by the E&W editors concluded that better socioeconomic conditions in the high-scoring *Länder*, Bavaria and Baden-Württemberg, explained the differences between German states, not pedagogical variance or educational policies.³⁰⁰ Although socioeconomic factors behind PISA results had not been completely ignored beforehand in the E&W³⁰¹, the reliance on the explanatory power of pedagogical methods, school structure and implemented policies had been the focus of searching for "answers" as we have seen in chapters two and three. The turn from looking at educational policies to external factors occurred, interestingly enough, when the variance at the *national* level had to be explained. Otherwise the focus of the PISA discourse seemed to be directed at the prevailing election context:

The campaigners are trying to draw superficial conclusions from those results, which first catch one's eye, in order to substantiate what they are always saying.³⁰²

²⁹⁸ Kahl, Reinhard (2002b) Die zweite Irritation. E&W 7–8/2002, 2; Editorial. E&W 7–8/2002, 3; Ballauf 2002d; Haas-Rietschel, Helga (2002d) Die Kinder der Migranten bleiben auf der Strecke. E&W 7–8/2002, 9–10.

²⁹⁹ Kahl 2002b.

³⁰⁰ Ballauf 2002d, 8; Der erste und der zweite Blick - Eine erste Analyse der Ergebnisse. E&W 7–8/2002, 12; Haas-Rietschel 2002d.

³⁰¹ See for example van Ackeren 2002a.

³⁰² "Die Wahlkämpfer versuchen, aus den auf den ersten Blick ins Auge fallenden Ergebnissen oberflächliche Resümees zu ziehen, um zu untermauern, was sie schon immer sagen." Der erste und der zweite Blick - Eine erste Analyse der Ergebnisse. E&W 7–8/2002, 11.

Demmer reported that some conservatives had pleaded for commendation for their party politics due to the high PISA-E results in conservative governed states such as Bavaria³⁰³, which seemed to prompt the GEW authors to concentrate on criticising the national politics. At the same time, however, Kahl did not try to hide the fact that the results were not what the GEW had wished for³⁰⁴. The GEW statement declared:

Instead of *party political instrumentalisation of PISA data*, thorough analyses are needed in order to elucidate correlations so that they can be effective in practice.³⁰⁵

The irritation at the conservative election campaigning seemed to have increased the need to underline rationalised statements and dampen the Bavarian results. As shown in the quote above, it seemed that the on-going political battle strengthened the GEW experience that in Germany PISA was used politically. Moreover, this seemed to reinforce the self-perception, according to which the GEW stance was not based on political ideologies, but on facts. Despite accusing politicians and the conservative party of using PISA in politics, the GEW seemingly did not conceive its own PISA framing as anything political.

However, the change in the earlier pattern of explaining PISA results did not reach the comparative gaze at the *international* level in the source material of this thesis: what was lacking was similar depth in scrutinising international results as had been conducted in the Bavarian case. Yet, it might have been impossible to have such detailed viewpoint to foreign countries in order to evaluate their background factors. Still, there were no signs of reconsidering the interpretations of other countries' success. It seemed that the final diagnosis had been already made. Rather peculiar was that Kahl had added the US to his list of "happy" countries, whose communal school culture he linked not only to cognitive but also economic success.³⁰⁶ The GEW also declared that Germany could substantially only improve by orientating to "international development

³⁰³ Demmer, Marianne (2002d) Der Bildungszwerg. E&W 7–8/2002, 13.

³⁰⁴ Kahl 2002b.

³⁰⁵ "Statt *parteilichtischer Instrumentalisierung der Pisa-Daten* werden vertiefende Analysen gebraucht mit dem Ziel, Zusammenhänge so aufzuklären, dass sie für die Praxis wirksam werden können." Der erste und der zweite Blick - Eine erste Analyse der Ergebnisse. E&W 7–8/2002, 11. *Italics added.*

³⁰⁶ Kahl 2002b; Skandinavische Lektionen. E&W 7–8/2002, 5.

in Finland, Canada and Sweden”.³⁰⁷ References to other countries thereby continued the earlier pattern of drawing a distinction between Germany and successful school culture in Scandinavia and North America.

3.7 Summary of the represented PISA results and conclusions

In chapter three I have examined various meanings that were attributed to success in PISA in the E&W. Altogether the analysed discourses show the taken-for-grantedness of PISA as an indicator of success on the one hand. On the other hand, selective tendencies could be discerned: when it came to Finland and England, PISA rankings had inspired the examination of the systems, whereas in the case of Sweden the PISA results were silenced, and the presentation of the case was based on earlier convictions of successful Swedish education. Although PISA thus had a different connection to each case, all the travel reports were framed as part of the search for causes and solutions for the PISA results.

Common for all representations was, however, that reforming the educational system was seen in a positive light. Sweden represented a country with a continuous capacity to reform, whereas England was an example showing that radical change is possible. The Finnish case was a more peculiar one and included elements from both categories, although, in the end the Finnish success was mostly explained by single systemic features. Furthermore, there seemed to be a tendency of simply linking Finland to the existing positive connotations of “Scandinavian” education. However, no other Scandinavian countries were mentioned.

As these reference countries were examined, the comparative eye concentrated on issues that were represented problematic in the German context. Nonetheless, it is understandable that comparison occurring in a national context does perceive other countries through its national framework, as it defines a problem in a national context and searches for solutions to it. Comparison may provide perspective to one’s own context and help reconsider features that would not otherwise stand out in one’s own context. However, the comparison might lead to hasty inferences, if the external

³⁰⁷ Der erste und der zweite Blick - Eine erste Analyse der Ergebnisse. E&W 7–8/2002, 11.

situations are not investigated in these cases with the same critical eye for the underlying factors as is acknowledged to exist in one's own context. The scrutiny of the PISA-E results compared to earlier PISA discussion in the E&W elucidated how differently success and failure were interpreted at the international level than within the national borders.

This analysis has demonstrated so far how the national "lenses" can guide the features that attract attention in foreign contexts, and that these selected features are then further interpreted through one's own contextual background. Bacchi has pointed out how examining cross-cultural comparisons can show that particular problem representations may be traced back to certain institutional and cultural contexts. In the E&W this became visible for example in the usage of the concept *Ganztagsschule* and *Gesamtschule*: it seemed that other countries' systems were discussed by referring to these German terms without considering that the concepts were linked to German particular institutional history and thus might not be congruent to describe foreign institutions. In the light of Bacchi's theory, the E&W material also demonstrated how the belief in fast solutions may silence the historical and contextual path dependencies and contingencies in each national case. Moreover, representing conclusions as the "rational" ones or "truths" limits the possibility of discussing the matter further.³⁰⁸

When it comes to consequences drawn from PISA, the viewpoints in the E&W in one way or another concluded, that German education needed a mental shift. This was argued to be not least due to the perceived harmful attitudes and practices of teachers, but also concerning the school structure level and the existing political values.³⁰⁹ Comparisons to "successful" countries had the function of demonstrating, how the change would begin "in the minds" (*in den Köpfen*) of teachers.³¹⁰ Later in autumn 2002 the call for a "paradigm shift" was justified by the "international proof" which was believed to substantiate that integration and individual learning support led to success. "International proof" became a common reference to PISA, even though the word PISA did not always have to be mentioned anymore.³¹¹

³⁰⁸ Bacchi, 12–14.

³⁰⁹ Kahl 2001b; Demmer 2002c, 15–16.

³¹⁰ Haas-Rietschel 2002b, 28, 30; Haas-Rietschel 2002c; Diehl, Ute (2002a) Netzwerk für Kinder. E&W 5/2002, 6–7.

³¹¹ Demmer, Marianne (2002e) Wirtschaft stellt Schulstruktur infrage. E&W 9/2002, 21.

Increasing individual support and “heterogeneity” in schooling, according to the representations of foreign examples was the most common message throughout the analysed material. The need of the GEW to keep promoting its views can be interpreted as an attempt to contribute to the mental shift among its members. The E&W material indicated that GEW still seemingly experienced strong societal resistance to its values and goals.

Aspects that were more compatible to the politicians’ viewpoints had to do with all-day schooling and early education. These issues were among the publically accepted responses to PISA according to Tillmann et al.³¹² In the GEW statements the emphasis on early education was visible in the longer goal of turning kindergartens into educational institutions after the model of other countries.³¹³ The state of kindergartens and the lack of all-day schooling were among the aspects in which Germany was represented to have fallen behind in a pattern of development, which other countries were claimed to have taken long ago.

In chapters two and three I have scrutinised the reactions and representations of German and foreign PISA results in the E&W and analysed their relations to one another. The following chapter rests on these findings and further treats the meanings that were attached to PISA in the E&W discussions.

4 The framing of PISA and framing with PISA in teachers’ discussion

By spring 2002, there was a tendency of starting almost every article in the E&W with a reference to PISA. Whether the article had to do with kindergarten, vocational education or university tuition fees, it seemed that PISA could offer a reference to any topic, although PISA had merely measured limited aspects of the achievement of 15-year-olds. In all cases it was not clear if the PISA reference in the lead text had come

³¹² Tillmann et al., 67.

³¹³ Hebenstreit-Müller & Müller; Demmer 2002a, 21.

from the authors themselves or from the E&W editors.³¹⁴ Besides the most common “PISA has shown that...” discourse that we have seen existed through the E&W discussion, other recognisable patterns continued to appear.

In any case, the trip to Sweden, which had been *planned long before the PISA results were published*, has convinced even the most stubborn doubters...³¹⁵

The emphasis on having planned trips to Sweden or discussed issues PISA brought to the table already “long before PISA”,³¹⁶ included a hint of pride that the actors themselves had been aware of the represented problems and sought solutions before the nationwide PISA shock. This again implied the authority given to PISA, and additionally gave the impression that the nationwide discussion had prompted the need to underline that PISA dealt with undeniable facts. Another question, which cannot be answered here, is whether the role of PISA was merely part of political argumentation or implied an actual belief in the reality that the PISA results formulated. A further pattern of argumentation, which at first glance gave a more moderate tone to the impression of giving all the credit to PISA, was the tendency to state that “not only, but also due to PISA...” areas of perceived problems such as early education could be finally reformed.³¹⁷ It was implied that PISA had changed the political wind and finally research experts were heard even among politicians³¹⁸. Thus, PISA was not represented to have been the first to discover deficits. However, given that PISA was represented to mirror the reality, this discourse eventually strengthened the message that PISA proved exactly what the GEW had been advocated for a long time.

As the GEW had concluded till May, the causes for the poor PISA performance of Germany were perceived to lie at the values in the system and within politics: competition and selection were said to prevail instead of integration and support.

³¹⁴ E.g. Peters, Carsten (2002) Vergessene Aspekte – Plädoyer gegen Strafgebühren. E&W 4/2002, 22; Herdt, Ursula (2002) Kellerkinder brauchen besondere Förderung. E&W 3/2002, 25; Ballauf, Helga (2002b) Lernoasen für Kleine und Große. E&W 5/2002, 13.

³¹⁵ “Jedenfalls hat die *längst vor der Veröffentlichung der PISA-Ergebnisse geplante* GEW-Reise mit Bildungsjournalisten nach Schweden selbst hartknäckige Zweifler überzeugt...” Editorial. E&W 3/2002, 3. Italics added.

³¹⁶ Editorial. E&W 3/2002, 3; Boehlkau, Tilman (2002) Mehr Zeit zum Lernen. E&W 3/2002, 34.

³¹⁷ Chefsache. E&W 1/2002, 4; Welzel, Steffen (2001a) Zu Besuch im Rosengarten – PreSchool in Schweden. E&W 12/2001, 17.

³¹⁸ Kahl 2002a, 21.

PISA's role had been to provide arguments for a transition from the past to new a direction of educational politics "with a future".³¹⁹

The following sections will go deeper into the roles that were attached to PISA and analyse them in relation to some aspects of the national political context of that time, which, as I attempt to show, seemed to reinforce the meaning that was attached to PISA. Therefore, the matter did not only concern the way that PISA was framed, but also how PISA framed the issues that were considered urgent in German educational politics.

4.1 The goal of a high performing, internationally competitive education system

By late spring 2002, the GEW had initiated a campaign "Save the *Bildung*" (*Rettet die Bildung*), which polemically left only two possible alternatives for the actual situation to proceed: "Either the right and appropriate steps are taken according to the actual findings... or *Bildung* in Germany descends even deeper into international mediocrity."³²⁰ With actual findings they again seemed to refer to PISA without explicitly mentioning it. The references to "right consequences" and "international mediocrity" indicated the taken-for-granted reception of PISA and the scale the OECD provided. Here one could argue that the GEW campaign was essentially linked to a political battle of the time; hence, it should not too hastily be interpreted as indicating factual trust in the OECD's worldview. Whichever the case, especially considering the E&W's function of informing teachers and influencing their opinion, this style of argumentation definitely might have fabricated and reproduced PISA's ascendancy in the teachers' self-understanding of their national education system. These patterns suggest that PISA had been given a political function within the GEW campaign. The chairperson of the GEW, Stange, declared:

Especially according to the results of the PISA study, action is urgently required. Germany needs a modern educational system, which *produces high performance*

³¹⁹ *Rettet die Bildung*. E&W 5/2002, 5.

³²⁰ "Entweder zieht sie aus den aktuellen Erkenntnissen die richtigen Konsequenzen... oder Bildung in Deutschland versinkt noch tiefer in internationale Mittelmässigkeit." Welzel, Steffen & Rödde, Ulf (2002) *Rettet die Bildung: Qualität entwickeln – Arbeitsbedingungen verbessern*. E&W 6/2002, 20–22.

and is involved in the society, meeting the needs of children, youth and adults.³²¹

Emphasis on achievement or performance orientation (*Leistungsfähigkeit*) of the system coming from Stange was interesting. The fact that the PISA discussion was tied up with the concept of ‘achievement’ (*Leistung*) is understandable since *performance* and *efficiency* were core concepts of PISA as an institution³²² and as we have seen so far, achievement defined by PISA was considered a desired goal in the E&W as well. Moreover, it might have been politically difficult for the GEW not to highlight the importance of achievement. According to Kreft, GEW was not the only labour union to state at the time that Germany ought to aim for a *Spitzenplatz* in international achievement tests³²³.

However, especially the political left and social democrat side in the German education debates had been given the connotation of not giving enough value to high achievement in contrast to the conservative party CDU/CSU, which demanded for more *Leistung*.³²⁴ In the E&W, this was visible as well; while some conservative voices uttered that PISA indicated that *Leistung* had not been emphasised enough, several the GEW-minded comments asserted the opposite: there had been too much achievement orientation which had further increased the selectivity of the system. There were several signs of conviction in the magazine that Germany was internationally known for its strict discipline system, which even the “Swedish conservatives” had set as their model, as Heinemann reported.³²⁵ The judgements of what the German reality in fact was like created an interestingly contradictory pattern.

Furthermore, it was acknowledged in the E&W that the conservatives accused the GEW of *Kuschelpädagogik* (“cuddle pedagogy”). The conservative logic was criticised for instance by pointing out that teachers’ approachable and considerate attitude to pupils

³²¹ “Gerade nach den Erkenntnissen der PISA-Studie ist Handeln dringend erforderlich. Deutschland braucht ein *leistungsfähiges* und in die Gesellschaft eingebundenes modernes Bildungssystem, das den Bedürfnissen von Kindern, Jugendlichen und Erwachsenen gerecht wird.” Stange, Eva-Maria (2002a) Wir wollen eine andere Bildungspolitik. E&W 4/2002, 4. Italics added.

³²² See OECD 2004, 3.

³²³ Kreft, 167–168.

³²⁴ Overesch, Anne (2007) Wie die Schulpolitik ihre Probleme (nicht) löst. Münster: Waxmann. 220–221.

³²⁵ Heinemann 2002a; Endres, 18; Demmer 2002c, 16; Haas-Rietschel 2002b.

did not necessarily preclude them from demanding performance as well.³²⁶ Later on, the PISA-E results were used to justify that the *Länder* with a social democrat government had been able to produce a “Gymnasium elite” just as well as the ones with CDU/CSU governments.³²⁷ The GEW’s Demmer described the school political debate of the time as follows:

As pedagogical laymen the Saxon culture minister Rößler and the president of the employers’ federation Hundt came out and promptly warned of cuddle pedagogy and again confounded learning and achieving with competition and failure threat.³²⁸

The discussion thereby resulted in an already existing German debate of different political understandings of what *Leistung* meant or what it should mean.³²⁹ In this light, the GEW seemingly had a strategy of responding to the conservative claims by highlighting, that the GEW in fact pleaded for “more achievement, not less”³³⁰. It seemed that in this respect, PISA encouraged to give in to the political accusations.

Although highlighting achievement may have been politically unavoidable at the time, the GEW could have, considering its determined political goals and the steadfast tone, taken a different stance against the strong achievement emphasis coming from an external agency such as the OECD. Apparently PISA and its framing as part of the GEW arguments might have had an impact on how statements of the capacity for international competition and the “right consequences” finally ended up as part of the official GEW argumentation.

PISA seemed to have made the need to give in to the political accusations even more necessary, but it was simultaneously utilised to provide arguments against the GEW’s perceived political opposition. The outcome was a rather ambiguous attitude towards the performance-oriented discourse of the OECD in the E&W. Nevertheless,

³²⁶ Welzel, Steffen 2002b, 24.

³²⁷ Der erste und der zweite Blick - Eine erste Analyse der Ergebnisse. E&W 7–8/2002, 13.

³²⁸ “Als pädagogische Laien outeten sich ein weiteres Mal der sächsische Kulturminister Rößler und Arbeitsgeberverbandspräsident Hundt, die umgehend wieder vor Kuschelpädagogik warnten und Lernen und Leisten ein weiteres Mal mit Konkurrenz und Versagendrohung verwechselten.” Demmer 2002a, 21.

³²⁹ See Overesch, 220–221.

³³⁰ Demmer 2002a, 22; Klemm.

achievement as defined by PISA was hardly put under question by the E&W readers or authors as I have shown in the previous chapters. Rather surprisingly, the only sign of a critical take on the OECD and PISA in my research period came from a reader as late as in June. The critic questioned the tendency of the E&W to treat PISA-results as an incontrovertible truth.³³¹ However, this criticism received no comments from the editors or other readers.

The GEW, however, dissociated itself from the KMK's declarations of encouraging competition between the *Länder*, which had been the political agreement of the KMK's ministers as part of their attempt to improve quality after the PISA results.³³² Nevertheless, at the same time the GEW accepted the importance of international competitiveness of the German system as part of their rhetoric:

Everyone knew it – PISA confirmed it: the German education system is not internationally competitive.³³³

Thus, it seemed that *competition* could attain different connotations in the context of international competition than when talking about competition within the German borders.³³⁴ In other words, international competition was perceived as a given task that could not be called in question, whereas the national competition initiated by the KMK was treated with suspicion. Other signs of worrying about German backwardness (*Deutscher Rückstand*) in educational and economic terms became visible also outside of the mere PISA discussion in the E&W. For instance, the OECD's Schleicher referred in his E&W column to the “proven” link between education and the “future competence” (*Zukunftsfähigkeit*) of countries. Hence, the apprehension about the economic future of the country was present in the magazine.³³⁵

³³¹ Hennig, Christian (2002) Not amused. E&W 6/2002, 33.

³³² Stange 2002a; KMK 2002, 3, 12.

³³³ “Alle haben es gewusst – PISA hat es bestätigt: Das deutsche Bildungswesen ist international nicht konkurrenzfähig.” Rettet die Bildung. E&W 5/2002, 5.

³³⁴ Flickschusterei. E&W 2/2002, 4; cf. Rettet die Bildung. E&W 5/2002, 5.

³³⁵ Schleicher, 2; see also Faber, Klaus (2002) Verpasst der Osten die Zukunft? E&W 2/2002, 28, 30; Endres, 18.

Although some commentators of the E&W rather uncritically referred to global urgencies, which the OECD rhetoric often leans on in their argumentation,³³⁶ it was interesting how globalisation on the other hand caused criticism in the magazine. The aforementioned contradiction in the discourses on high performance and competition became even more apparent in the simultaneous existence of crisis rhetoric and direct protests against globalisation effects on education. The on-going negotiations of the GATS treaty in spring 2002 were observed critically in the E&W, discussing the possible threats to education as a public good. GATS, the General Agreement of Trade in Services, was a process initiated by the World Trade Organisation in 1994 in order to achieve a multilateral agreement over the liberalisation of trading in services³³⁷. The statement to the matter in the E&W was expressed explicitly: *Bildung* must not become a product.³³⁸ Elmar Altvater implied that through GATS the social equality aspect – inherent in the GEW understanding of *Bildung* throughout the research material – was now threatened by the neoliberal ideology of privatisation. According to Altvater, such an ideology prevailed in the attitudes of many regular teachers even outside what he called the “neoliberal camp”.³³⁹

The GEW was likewise disquieted and feared that the KMK would not understand the dangers, which “American test institutes” or “New Zealand education companies” urging to open the educational market could cause to the national educational policymaking. Their concern was that through GATS, external actors and “monopolists of the international education market” could determine learning contents, “define the standards” and control results instead of national and local democratic organs. Heinemann even stated how unsurprising it was that there were power relations hidden under the formal equality of market participants. Consequently, it was seen as the task

³³⁶ E.g. Nuissl, Ekkehard (2002) Lehren sollte nur wer selbst lernt. E&W 6/2002, 14; regarding the “crisis rhetoric” surrounding globalisation discourses, see Auld & Morris.

³³⁷ Robertson, Susan, Bonal, Xavier & Dale, Roger (2002) GATS and the Education Service Industry: The Politics of Scale and Global Reterritorialization. *Comparative Education Review*, 46(4), 473.

³³⁸ Altvater, Elmar (2002) Freier Handel oder freier Zugang? Die Auswirkungen des GATS auf das Bildungswesen. E&W 4/2002, 2; Heinemann, Karl-Heinz (2002b) GATS – Freihandel und die Folgen für das Bildungswesen. E&W 4/2002, 6–9; Stange, Eva-Maria (2002b) Folgeeinschätzung ist angesagt. E&W 4/2002, 9.

³³⁹ Altvater.

of the GEW to remind the public and the politicians of the effects of globalisation on education.³⁴⁰

However, this critical take to capitalism and globalisation effects on education did not lead to a similarly sceptical view of the OECD. The articles treating globalisation did not discuss PISA or the OECD: these were completely separate topics in the E&W. For instance, the concept of *standards* was treated in a different context in globalisation articles than in the PISA discussions, which had particularly stated the need for nationwide educational standards.³⁴¹ It seemed that GATS had received a threatening connotation due to its possible *direct* power with binding rules over national governments³⁴², whereas the OECD's influence might not have been perceived as power because of its *soft* means to provide recommendations.³⁴³

There were, however, several German contemporary educationists who publically questioned the interests behind the goals of increasing standardised steering, labour market orientation and autonomy in education. In their “Frankfurt Pleas” (*Frankfurter Einsprüche*), published in 2005, the critics perceived these features among others as a result of politics that followed the logic of international achievement tests. According to the critics, the technocratic “quality management” discourse of educational monitoring and efficiency was transforming educational systems into market-oriented enterprises. Moreover, the critics alluded to the tendency of treating assessment instruments such as PISA as self-evident.³⁴⁴ One of them, Frank-Olaf Radtke argued against the prevailing presumption that improving quality in education by orienting to international comparisons would actually increase social equality³⁴⁵. An opposing argument came from Heinz-Elmar Tenorth, a German historian of education, who questioned these claims of the economisation of education. Tenorth stated that the Frankfurt Pleas

³⁴⁰ Heinemann 2002b; Stange 2002b.

³⁴¹ Stange 2002b; cf. Haas-Rietschel 2002c.

³⁴² See Robertson et al., 473.

³⁴³ Bieber & Martens; Wiseman 2013.

³⁴⁴ Gruschka, Andreas, Herrmann, Ulrich, Radtke, Frank-Olaf, Rauin, Udo, Ruhloff, Jörg, Rumpf, Horst & Winkler, Michael (2005) Das Bildungswesen ist kein Wirtschafts-Betrieb! Fünf Einsprüche gegen die technokratische Umsteuerung des Bildungswesens. In Frost, Ursula (ed.) *Unternehmen Bildung: Die Frankfurter Einsprüche und kontroverse Positionen zur aktuellen Bildungsreform*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 12–18; Radtke, Frank-Olaf (2006) Erziehung, Markt und Gerechtigkeit. *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, 52(1), 52–59.

³⁴⁵ Radtke, 56–59.

offered no alternatives, stood on the way of progress and merely glorified the past. Whereas the critics had expressed the concern that external agents would determine educational goals, Tenorth asserted that the educational science would retain the control of the evaluation culture³⁴⁶.

In contrast, my analysis has shown so far that many GEW commentators had been convinced by PISA. For them, the results had provided what they had wished to hear: PISA had proven that socio-economic equity and excellence were compatible, that is, low variance in performance could exist simultaneously with high achievement. Therefore, the E&W authors did not question PISA as an institution; instead, they spread further the message of the PISA advocates, who asserted that in Germany, too, reforms increasing autonomy and standardisation were required. International influence in the magazine was seen as something different when talking about PISA than when talking about globalisation effects. According to the GEW's own representation they were, unlike the KMK, aware of the threats that global influence crossing national borders might cause for public education. It was interesting that the GEW in this light did not critically scrutinise the background of the OECD's educational influence and its possible impact on national policymaking.

4.2 Bildung and PISA

In summer and autumn 2002 the battle against the German culture of selectivity was continuing in the E&W, but with more defined arguments.³⁴⁷ The articles increasingly discussed the prevailing inequalities in the German school system, that is, the high correlation of socioeconomic background and achievement, which the international PISA tests had indicated. The PISA-E results were said to have confirmed this earlier finding. In the repeated arguments against the German school structure it was growingly referred to the explanation of Finland's success, namely the policy of "not leaving any child behind". This image of the Finnish "success" thus was seen to legitimise the old

³⁴⁶ Tenorth, Heinz-Elmar (2005) Milchkädchenrechnung: Warum der Vorwurf der Ökonomisierung des Bildungswesens falsch ist. *Die Zeit*, 41/2005, 6 October 2005. <http://www.zeit.de/2005/41/C-Bildungsforscher>. Accessed 23 November 2017.

³⁴⁷ The E&W September 2002 issue focused on "Selection in Germany".

GEW arguments.³⁴⁸ It seemed that the previous glorifying attention to Sweden had gradually evaporated.

The scrutiny of prevailing inequalities in Germany now leaned more pronouncedly on research. What the magazine had not earlier covered conceptually was the special German “tradition of *Bildungsbürgertum*” (educated bourgeoisie), to which researchers Klaus-Jürgen Tillmann and Micha Brumlik attributed the German reproduction of inequality in the magazine³⁴⁹. Tillmann and Frank-Olaf Radtke remarked in E&W’s interviews how German teachers made tracking recommendations based on socioeconomic background of pupils and not on their performance as the official version of tracking argued. The conclusion seemed to be that if the system left teachers and schools the possibility of delegating “problems”, they would use it.³⁵⁰ Brumlik defined this as the “ideology” of German bourgeoisie, which wanted to keep *Bildung* as social capital within a narrow elite. He claimed that the lack of courage in green and social democrat education politics caused the continuation of this old ideology of a “natural elite” or inherited intelligence, even though the ideals of these parties were contradicting it.³⁵¹ These argumentation patterns accorded with the earlier GEW representations of the selective attitudes in the German society at large. Notable was also that Radtke and Tillmann’s statements on the pages of the E&W at that point appeared congruent with the GEW’s approach to the educational problems of Germany; thus differing from the later critical stances they have had to PISA.

The theoretical understanding of education, or in German understanding, *Bildung*, characterised the German researchers’ debate about PISA also outside the E&W discussion. The historical roots of the concept of *Bildung* trace back to the 18th century and the neo-humanist philosophies of Johann Gottfried Herder and Wilhelm von Humboldt. Based on the self-liberation ideal of the Enlightenment and the goal of ideal humanity, *Bildung* denoted the need of individuals to interact and cope with the ‘world’

³⁴⁸ Heinemann, Karl-Heinz (2002d) Für den D-Day gewappnet. E&W 7–8/2002, 18; Thöne, Ulrich (2002b) Berlin ist pleite. E&W 7–8/2002, 27; Brumlik, Micha (2002) Verfestigung von Klassenschränken. E&W 9/2002, 2; Demmer 2002e, 19.

³⁴⁹ Haas-Rietschel, Helga (2002e) Die doppelte Benachteiligung. E&W 9/2002, 8; Brumlik.

³⁵⁰ Haas-Rietschel 2002e; Haas-Rietschel, Helga (2002f) Wie Schule Ungleichheit herstellt. E&W 9/2002, 11–12, 14.

³⁵¹ Brumlik.

in order to develop and unfold themselves.³⁵² After the release of the PISA 2000, critical German educationists started to question the compatibility of *Bildung* with the empirical, functional approach of measurable outcomes that PISA had to education³⁵³.

Despite his criticism regarding the German tradition of *Bildungsbürgertum*, Brumlik also claimed in the E&W that the PISA concept of “literacy” represented a renaissance of a neo-humanist ideal of *Bildung*.³⁵⁴ In addition, the traditional German conceptualisation of *Bildung* was embedded in GEW statements concerning early education, in which their emphasis on the principle of social equality was explicit. The traditional elements were visible for instance in how the GEW emphasised that *Bildung* emerged nowhere else than in children themselves; yet the text remarked that this subjectivity should not be misunderstood — adults were the ones to ensure that children were allowed this “access to the world” (*Zugang zur Welt*).³⁵⁵ Here one should note that the self-orientation and the emphasis on *Bildung* as inner processes of an individual were an inherent part of the traditional understanding of *Bildung*.³⁵⁶

It is interesting that while these historical conceptualisations of *Bildung* were guiding the understanding of education within the GEW, the German tradition of interpreting *Bildung* caused suspicion. Apparently it was expected that *Bildung* existed as an ideal and as a natural concept that had merely been misused in German history. If interpreted through Koselleck’s theory, one could say that Brumlik’s representation and the overall GEW argumentation implicitly created continuity from the *Bildung* tradition to PISA³⁵⁷. The discourses seemed to aim at reducing the tension between experience and expectations, between Germany’s own tradition and the international trends.

While within the E&W it was implied that PISA represented similar elements than the traditional understanding of *Bildung*, other commentators in the academic German

³⁵² See Masschelein & Ricken, 140.

³⁵³ Gruber, 201.

³⁵⁴ Brumlik.

³⁵⁵ Eibeck, Bernhard (2002) Akteur seiner Selbst. E&W 9/2002, 18.

³⁵⁶ See Horlacher, Rebekka (2012) What is *Bildung*? Or: why *Pädagogik* cannot get away from the concept of *Bildung*. In Siljander, Pauli, Kivelä, Ari & Sutinen, Ari (eds.) *Theories of Bildung and Growth. Connections and Controversies between Continental Educational Thinking and American Pragmatism*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 136–138.

³⁵⁷ Koselleck.

discussion specifically underlined that PISA could not be compatible with *Bildung*.³⁵⁸ Contemporaries such as Rudolf Messner expressed concerns of the public misunderstanding, which conceived PISA as an all-encompassing concept of liberal education. For Messner, the responses to PISA in Germany entailed the risk of narrowing down the meaning and goals of schooling and instruction and neglecting the aesthetic aspects of *Bildung*.³⁵⁹ Altogether, what stirred the academic debate was the suspicion on the measurability of *Bildung*³⁶⁰, as well as the concern that PISA lacked an explicit educational theory. Dietrich Benner accused the PISA tests of covering an unsatisfactory selection of elements and not being sufficient to judge the quality of instruction.³⁶¹ Daniel Tröhler further criticised the German OECD texts for not defining *Bildung*, but merely referring to Wilhelm von Humboldt, which according to Tröhler was an attempt to legitimise the concept of competence³⁶².

The German PISA experts such as Eckhard Klieme and other researchers responded to the criticism and underlined that PISA's concept of *competence* pertained very much the same elements aiming at lifelong cultivation as the concept of *Bildung*.³⁶³ Additionally, in 2002 Klieme together with another empirical educational scientist Petra Stanat remarked the still prevailing limitations concerning the explanatory power of assessment results.³⁶⁴ Besides these statistically oriented educational researchers, advocating comments came from historians of education as well. Achim Leschinsky

³⁵⁸ E.g. Tröhler, Daniel (2011) Concepts, cultures and comparisons: PISA and the Double German Discontentment. In Pereyra, Miguel A., Kotthoff, Hans-Georg & Cowen, Robert (eds.) *PISA Under Examination: Changing Knowledge, Changing Tests, and Changing Schools*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 245–257.

³⁵⁹ Messner, Rudolf (2003) PISA und Allgemeinbildung. *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, 49(3), 400–412.

³⁶⁰ Gruber 2006, 201.

³⁶¹ Benner, Dietrich (2002) Die Struktur der Allgemeinbildung im Kerncurriculum moderner Bildungssysteme. Ein Vorschlag zur bildungstheoretischen Rahmung von PISA. *Zeitschrift für Pädagogik*, 48(1), 68–90.

³⁶² Tröhler, Daniel (2011) Concepts, cultures and comparisons: PISA and the Double German Discontentment. In Pereyra, Miguel A., Kotthoff, Hans-Georg & Cowen, Robert (eds.) *PISA Under Examination: Changing Knowledge, Changing Tests, and Changing Schools*. Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 247–252.

³⁶³ Klieme, Eckhard, Avenarius, Hermann, Blum, Werner, Döbrich, Peter, Gruber, Hans, Prenzel, Manfred, Reiss, Kristina, Riquarts, Kurt, Rost, Jürgen, Tenorth, Heinz-Elmar & Vollmer, Helmut J. (2003) *Zur Entwicklung nationaler Bildungsstandards. Eine Expertise*. Berlin: BMBF, 56, 65.

³⁶⁴ Klieme, Eckhard & Stanat, Petra (2002) Zur Aussagekraft Internationaler Schulleistungsvergleiche: Befunde und Erklärungsansätze am Beispiel von Pisa. *Bildung und Erziehung*, 55(1), 25–44.

declared that the critics underestimated the philosophical depth of PISA's functional approach³⁶⁵. Heinz-Elmar Tenorth claimed that within a project such as PISA an independent educational theory would be developed by itself, thus suggesting that PISA encompassed an in-depth philosophical background.³⁶⁶ It seemed that while the PISA advocates defended the actual intentions of PISA and reminded the critics of the early stage in the development of methodological limitations, the critics in contrast were concerned of the *unintended* effects of the public and political reception of the PISA study.

Rebekka Horlacher has observed the German PISA debate and suggested, that as in the German versions of the OECD texts 'education' was translated as 'Bildung', it was made possible to assert the compatibility of PISA to the German tradition.³⁶⁷ To understand this translational choice it must be noted that *Erziehung* has traditionally been the term used for education. Yet, in recent decades a shift has occurred in the academic field of educational science in German-speaking countries: alongside the discipline that had always been called *Erziehungswissenschaft* an alternative term *Bildungswissenschaften* has become popular to address a broader selection of approaches to education. While *Erziehung* is usually associated with the upbringing of children, *Bildung* has become the term that connotes with larger issues and is seen to be more congruent with neuropsychological approaches to education.³⁶⁸ In this light it seemed that in the German PISA debate of the early 2000s it was partially expected that the PISA project would entail theoretical perspectives to education in similar depth and form as in the particular history of German *Erziehungswissenschaft*.

According to Bellmann, those who were irritated by the aims to combine *Bildung* with the OECD concepts understood PISA as "American pragmatism", which is why PISA for them appeared in such a contrast compared to the German educational

³⁶⁵ Leschinsky, 832–833.

³⁶⁶ Tenorth, Heinz-Elmar (2004) Stichwort: „Grundbildung“ und „Basiskompetenzen“: Herkunft, Bedeutung und Probleme im Kontext allgemeiner Bildung. *Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft*, 7(2), 169–182.

³⁶⁷ Horlacher, Rebekka (2011) *Bildung*. Bern: Haupt Verlag, 102.

³⁶⁸ See Bellmann, Johannes (2014) The changing field of educational studies and the task of theorizing education. In Biesta, Gert, Allan, Julie & Edwards, Richard (eds.) *Making a Difference in Theory: The theory question in education and the education question in theory*. London: Routledge, 65–81.

philosophy.³⁶⁹ Such an interpretation of PISA seemed to lead to a critical attitude towards it, whereas in the E&W there was no sign of perceiving PISA completely separate from the German tradition. Consequently, understanding PISA as a reflection of the ideal of *Bildung* in the E&W, as we saw above, may have had an impact on the acceptant attitude towards PISA. This conclusion can be supported by Horlacher's notion of how German translations of the OECD texts using the word *Bildung* might have made the OECD conceptualisation of education appear more compatible to the German tradition.³⁷⁰

Towards autumn 2002 the E&W cited researchers saying that PISA could not answer the question of causes and correlations, but as previously, such statements were immediately followed by requests to politicians to “draw consequences” of certain “findings”. In this way the arguments remained as ambiguous as in the earlier reactions. On the other hand, Heinemann showed a sign of critical reflection when he admitted that autonomy, personality, and critical thinking indeed could not be easily measured. These aspects Heinemann mentioned could be found in the humanist *Bildung* conceptualisations, although he did not refer to these as German tradition³⁷¹. Still, he continued to assert that it was an indisputable fact that PISA indicators such as literacy and capacity of teamwork were connected to these required aspects of *Bildung* he had mentioned. This is why, according to Heinemann, the GEW's support of the PISA indicators implied progress.³⁷²

To some extent, the expectations within the GEW thus equated PISA to *Bildung*. It may indeed have been easier to connect PISA to Germany's own traditional educational thinking than accept the conflict between one's experience and expectations. This explanation seems even more plausible considering that in the 1990s the GEW had still been rather critical of international large-scale assessments³⁷³.

As it seemed that the GEW defined education as *Bildung für alle*, they automatically expected the concept to include equity aspects. However, according to Horlacher, it was

³⁶⁹ Bellmann 2007.

³⁷⁰ Horlacher 2011, 102.

³⁷¹ See e.g. Masschelein & Ricken, 140–142; Horlacher 2011.

³⁷² Heinemann 2002d.

³⁷³ See Kreft, 167; Hartong, 208–209.

the Frankfurter School academics that re-established the social function of *Bildung* from the late 18th century. Consequently, the interpretations of *Bildung* have varied in history and there has never been a unified understanding of *Bildung*.³⁷⁴ Thereby, even very diverging political opinions could claim rights for the concept by selecting historical definitions, which fit their understanding.³⁷⁵

This kind of usage of *Bildung* in the E&W therefore seemed to include a hint of inflation of the concept. Horlacher has noted how the concept of *Bildung* still exerts influence on all sides of the German PISA debate. The concept is used both by those who link PISA to competence and those who criticise the measuring approach, but Horlacher claims neither side is taking into account the different historical connotations and implicit expectations embedded within *Bildung*.³⁷⁶ Looking at the E&W discussion, it also seemed that the concepts that were used were not defined. The E&W's references to *Bildung* in comparison with the academic discussion at the time demonstrated what Horlacher has pointed out — that the concept entails historical legitimising power.

The relation to the German tradition in the E&W seemed on the one hand to be based on the interpretation of *Bildung* as a timeless virtue and a useful slogan towards social equality. On the other hand, the understanding of *tradition* was based on the frustration of the national educational politics and the experience of a continuous lack of reform since the 1960s. It seemed that this relation and experience of the German tradition might have contributed remarkably to the perception of PISA and to the roles that were attached to it.

4.3 Economic growth and PISA

Another aspect that seemingly received a gradually more refined tone owing to the PISA discussion concerned the relationship between education and economy. From summer 2002 onwards it was more pronouncedly argued in the E&W that the economic future of Germany required reforms, which would orientate to international “models”

³⁷⁴ Horlacher 2012, 141–143.

³⁷⁵ See Horlacher 2011.

³⁷⁶ Horlacher 2011, 97–98.

and that “school success” would lead to economic growth.³⁷⁷ Kahl for instance stated that the Scandinavian, Canadian and even the US school culture would, besides increasing cognitive achievement, also lead to economic success³⁷⁸. Kahl’s documentary film “*Spitze! Schulen am Wendekreis der Pädagogik*” about the reasons behind Swedish and Finnish innovative knowledge societies was advertised as commissioned by the GEW.³⁷⁹

The reliance on the “proven” connection of *Bildung* and economic growth by the OECD appeared also in Haas-Rietschel’s interview of the OECD’s Schleicher. Although the interviewer showed signs of caution concerning effects of privatisation on social inequality, Schleicher defended entrepreneurial interest in education. He evaded the privatisation question by claiming that successful countries such as Finland and Japan were in fact models of practically “privatised” schools because of their pedagogical autonomy and responsibility over results. Despite the clear resistance to privatisation of education within the E&W as seen in the GATS discussion, Schleicher’s arguments did not seem to cause further questions or criticism in the magazine. The only aspect that seemed to attract attention was the interest economy now showed in education, which was seen to promote the goals of the GEW: more societal appreciation for education.³⁸⁰ Other simultaneous calls for learning from Scandinavian school autonomy indicated that the OECD message regarding this issue had convinced many E&W commentators³⁸¹. In other words, it seemed that any other economic interests were silenced.

In summer 2002 the E&W announced that the KMK had decided to implement national educational standards, which also accorded with the OECD recommendations for an efficient school system³⁸². Centralised achievement tests and standards still caused concerns for some E&W writers, who feared that in a selective system they would lead to school ranking, although politicians and researchers such as Klemm affirmed in the

³⁷⁷ Demmer 2002d; Haas-Rietschel 2002d, 10; Kahl 2002b.

³⁷⁸ Kahl 2002b.

³⁷⁹ Skandinavische Lektionen. E&W 7–8/2002, 5.

³⁸⁰ Haas-Rietschel, Helga (2002g) Bildungsinvestition rechnet sich. E&W 9/2002, 26; Welzel, Steffen (2002e) Viel Konsens auf dem Feld der Glaubenskriege. E&W 9/2002, 22–24.

³⁸¹ E.g. Heinemann 2002d; Welzel, Steffen (2002d) Bei Defiziten müssen Unterstützungssysteme greifen. E&W 7–8/2002, 14.

³⁸² Welzel, Steffen 2002d, 14; see also Bieber & Martens, 104.

magazine that such assessments would raise achievement and thereby “quality”. It was still constantly asserted that systematic achievement tests were a “normal” measure both in Sweden and Finland.³⁸³ It seemed again that caution was expressed only towards what national politicians would implement; international standards were, as we have seen so far, taken as given and not further questioned.

The ascendancy of economy in defining education was also visible when the GEW drew attention to emergent societal support for its goals within research institutes such as the *Bertelsmann Stiftung* (The Bertelsmann Foundation of Germany) and several representatives of the economy. The pleas of the *Baden-Württembergischer Handwerkstag* (Confederation of Skilled Crafts in Baden-Württemberg) for a nine-year comprehensive school system were interpreted as a sign of support for the GEW goals: even “the economy” was seen to question the school structure. The *Handwerkstag* plea was framed to represent the desired reform capacity in society.³⁸⁴ Demmer framed the issue again from the national polemic angle:

And *who still believes that the Handwerk is a haven of conservatism* and hangs on traditional talent theories will [...] be disabused. What can be seen there is for Germany almost a sensationally determined education policy position, which is based on international standards and processes latest research results.³⁸⁵

Demmer praised the call of the *Handwerkstag* for combining all resources and ideas to reach a “*Spitzenplatz*” in the next PISA rounds.³⁸⁶ The represented connection between the PISA ranking and economic growth was therefore accepted. Similar opinions concerning early tracking were reported coming from the consultant company McKinsey and *Handelskammer* of Hessen³⁸⁷. What seemed decisive for Demmer though, was her experience that the *Handwerkstag* broke the national taboo by demanding the end of the three-tier school structure. Thus for Demmer, the representatives of the economy acted with courage contrasting what she perceived as

³⁸³ Welzel, Steffen 2002d; Haas-Rietschel 2002d, 10; Heinemann 2002d.

³⁸⁴ Editorial. E&W 9/2002, 3; Demmer 2002e.

³⁸⁵ “Und *wer noch glaubt, das Handwerk sei ein Hort des Konservatismus* und hänge überkommenen Begabungstheorien an, wird [...] eines Besseren belehrt. Was dort zu lesen ist, ist eine für Deutschland geradezu sensationelle bildungspolitische Positionsbestimmung, die sich an internationalen Maßstäben orientiert und aktuelle Forschungsergebnisse verarbeitet.” Demmer 2002e, 19. Italics added.

³⁸⁶ Demmer 2002e, 20.

³⁸⁷ Demmer 2002e, 21.

the “inconsequent” action of the KMK politicians.³⁸⁸ It is interesting how this experienced support from the economy seemed to be determined by the perception of *traditional*. This representation highlighted how the economy was not, contrasting the expectations, as conservative as it was assumed but instead demanded similar changes as the GEW.

It seems that the GEW’s relation to the “economy” at this time was connected to its perceptions of the national situation. More precisely, this understanding, according to which the educational problems in Germany derived at least partially from the political conservatism and traditional attitudes, seemed to affect how PISA was framed and how the interests of the economy were interpreted. What received no attention here, or in Bacchi’s terms was silenced, was the possibility that there might be other interests behind the economic perspective than the social equality principle that the GEW followed³⁸⁹.

Educational researchers such as Martens and Wolf and Tröhler have shown how the PISA project was initiated by national interests: France and the US initiated the collection of comparative data for their particular concerns within the Cold War power structure.³⁹⁰ Martens and Wolf have argued that despite the original objective of increasing democracy in educational policymaking, the unintended consequences of the internationalisation of educational politics have led to a decrease in national control over its educational politics³⁹¹. While one can discuss over such an assertion³⁹², an awareness of these background aspects and national interests was seemingly not present in the E&W discussions of PISA. Rather, the E&W discourses resembled what has been called the “paradigm of problem-solving”³⁹³, which dismisses path-dependent contextual factors in each national context³⁹⁴.

³⁸⁸ Demmer 2002e, 20.

³⁸⁹ Bacchi, 12–14, 207.

³⁹⁰ Martens & Wolf; Tröhler 2013.

³⁹¹ Martens & Wolf, 165.

³⁹² Cf. Dale 2003. Dale among others has argued against the common belief that globalisation would be de-nationalising educational systems that once would have been completely independent of external influence.

³⁹³ Bacchi, 242–245; Dale 2009.

³⁹⁴ Cf. Simola et al.

Although the GATS discussion had shown that the GEW was concerned about the marketisation of education, at this point the interests of the economy were not scrutinised with a similarly critical take. Outside the E&W, several contemporary educationists in Frankfurt had expressed concerns that politics following the economic interests might unintentionally lead to a market-oriented educational system³⁹⁵. For the GEW however, it was convincing enough that the explicit goal of the economy was perceived to be a comprehensive school system. This representation depicted the economy as standing for positive progress and following actual scientific knowledge, contrasting the perception of the national tradition, which was seen to follow archaic and obsolete illusions ignoring the latest empirical findings. The role of PISA was functionalised in this particular context; in other words, in this pattern it represented the change against the perceived problem. The fact how the interest of the economy in education served for the GEW goals and was treated accordingly demonstrated how the ascendancy of the economy in defining education could increase through PISA.

4.4 The national obstacles towards an education “of the future”

Throughout the E&W material the GEW declared that favourable conditions for educational reform had arrived in the German society since PISA. In spring and summer 2002, however, the statements in the magazine gradually began to express more and more frustration of the “hectic standstill and conceptless politicking” that was perceived to occur among KMK ministers. This was seen to prevent the required transition in educational politics.³⁹⁶

As this analysis has shown so far, the GEW emphasised the principle of pupil heterogeneity as a solution to educational problems in particular in the June 2002 issue of the E&W, which focused thematically on this very topic. The significance of PISA in this argumentation was that the results were continuously stated to have proven, that attempts to produce homogeneity through selection had failed, and that a school

³⁹⁵ Gruschka et al.; Radtke, 57.

³⁹⁶ “hektischem Stillstand und konzeptionslosem Aktionismus”. Rettet die Bildung. E&W 5/2002, 5; Demmer 2002b; Welzel & Rödde.

structure debate should be started again. The problem was seen to be though, that no one had the courage to lead this debate.³⁹⁷ Demmer declared in summer:

However, the discussion about the quality of the school system is ultimately a political one. PISA provided a good basis for this with its comparative data. Because PISA compares school systems and not teaching styles or qualities. It is therefore disingenuous when the Ministers of Education unanimously declare that one can discuss all sorts of things, just not "system issues".³⁹⁸

Interestingly enough, at this point the earlier assumptions that causes for PISA were partially to be found in teaching methods had seemingly been forgotten. On the one hand, here Demmer depicted the school system as a result of political *choices*, contrasting the earlier common references to the division between facts and fiction. On the other hand, representing PISA as facts still dominated her thinking: the quote above demonstrates how PISA was represented as an unbiased authority with no historical or political context. In contrast, German traditional and historical context was reduced to a political game.

Following Bacchi's approach to problem representations, it is relevant to acknowledge how the comparisons to other countries in the E&W did not pay much attention to the contexts of these countries. The PISA-E discussion, however, showed how the comparison within the national context was different in the way that it sought explanations from contextual and socioeconomic factors, since explaining success with the political direction of the "successful" regions was regarded as undesired. There was thereby a difference in how international phenomena were observed compared to the evaluation of the national phenomena.

The politicians and the KMK ministers were thus seen as hindrance to development and progress. It seemed that with its PISA interpretations, the GEW endeavoured to frame its own political action as the one actively trying to increase achievement in benefit of the whole country. This was contrasted with the representation of the political

³⁹⁷ Demmer 2002c, 17; Haas-Rietschel 2002c.

³⁹⁸ "Die Diskussion um die Qualität des Schulsystems sei jedoch letztlich eine politische. PISA habe mit seinen Vergleichsdaten dazu eine gute Grundlage geliefert. Denn PISA vergleiche Schulsysteme und nicht Unterrichtsstile oder -qualitäten. Es sei deshalb unredlich, wenn die Kultusminister unisono erklären, dass man über alles Mögliche diskutieren dürfe, nur nicht über 'Systemfragen'." Heinemann 2002d, 19.

opposition, which was seen to keep insisting on outmoded and ideological principles not only at the cost of equality but also of performance.³⁹⁹ Apparently PISA had contributed to the increasing tendency to refer to *achievement* and *performance* when legitimating arguments.

Some E&W commentators drew parallels between their frustration at the politicians' insufficient reactions to PISA 2000 and the stagnation after the school debate in 1960s and 1970s, or what was called the "turf war" (*Grabenkämpfe*).⁴⁰⁰ During this previous educational debate, topics such as inequality issues and the question of the three-tier structure had also been discussed, and the *Gesamtschule* had been introduced as a compromise following the dispute⁴⁰¹. Apparently many GEW's commentators belonged to the group of contemporaries who were still unsatisfied with the outcome of the old debate. A similar perspective from contemporary researchers at the time can be seen for example in Leschinsky's article, where he diagnosed the German history of educational politics and asserted that the German way of politics fundamentally differed from countries with higher PISA results. Leschinsky tried to trace the causes behind the German "educational misery" and the continuous lack of reform.⁴⁰² The E&W comments and Leschinsky had in common both the tendency of lumping other countries together as if they all were following a certain policy direction that Germany was not, and the conviction that PISA results indicated this difference.

Leaning on Koselleck's concepts of the space of experience and the horizon of expectations, it seemed that the experiences of the past educational debates reinforced what was experienced at present and how expectations concerning the future were formulated⁴⁰³. Seemingly PISA had opened up a window of "possibilities" regarding the future with its examples of "success". These expectations of what the school system should and could be doing seemed to fuel the frustration concerning past educational politics. This contributed to the representation of a continued lack of reform in Germany. In the light of Koselleck's approach, the GEW's campaign to "save the *Bildung*" can be seen as an attempt to decrease tension between experience and

³⁹⁹ Demmer 2002b; Demmer 2002c, 16; Klemm; Diehl 2002b, 9.

⁴⁰⁰ Demmer 2002b; Klemm.

⁴⁰¹ Niemann, 63–63; Bellmann 2007, 422.

⁴⁰² Leschinsky, 818–839.

⁴⁰³ See Koselleck, 358.

expectations. Apparently the GEW endeavoured to create a new continuity: the aim was to reach the expectations of an educational reality that was presumed to exist at the international level.

Demmer called for a “professional dealing with heterogeneity” contrasting it with the danger of an “ideological school fight”, as the 1960s debate was presented throughout the E&W material.⁴⁰⁴ As we have seen in chapter three, the way of framing heterogeneity as “practical rationality” and references to other countries’ “intelligent” integrated systems attributed PISA the role of *reason* against the political opposition.⁴⁰⁵ This pattern in the GEW arguments resembles what Bellmann has observed in Germany’s educational reform debate: the reformers in the 2000s perceived themselves to be different from the “ideologists” in the 1960s and 1970s debate.⁴⁰⁶ The way that PISA indicated truth in the E&W demonstrated how PISA as an institution was conceived in a non-political way. References to the “PISA drama” or “theatre” as well as to the “ideological” German politics indicated the overall disapprobation about the perceived political use of PISA.⁴⁰⁷ In contrast, there were no hints of any E&W commentators acknowledging or admitting that their own attitudes to PISA would obtain anything “political”.

The problematisations and representations of solutions thus built on the juxtaposition between the professional, rational and practical on the one hand, contrasted to the ideological and political on the other hand. What is relevant here is to recognise how this argumentation pattern caused a tone of absoluteness concerning PISA and implied that the situation would require a “reform”. Leaning on Bacchi’s understanding of representations of problems, such views created a discursive effect, which limited what could be thought and said by assuming that there were no alternatives — following PISA was “right”, whereas everything else was “ideological” and therefore false. Such a representation made it difficult to question PISA and how it should be applied in practice.⁴⁰⁸ Additionally, throughout the E&W material it seemed that rarely these

⁴⁰⁴ Demmer 2002c, 16; see also Diehl 2002b, 9.

⁴⁰⁵ Demmer 2002c, 17; Holzapfel; Editorial. E&W 1/2002, 3; Schnell & Kehl, 26.

⁴⁰⁶ Bellmann 2007, 422.

⁴⁰⁷ Editorial. E&W 1/2002, 3; Alexander, 6.

⁴⁰⁸ See Bacchi, 15–16, 284.

arguments clarified what acting according to PISA or drawing conclusions from PISA would mean in reality.

The lack of self-reflection is interesting especially in the light of the criticism that the GEW received from several readers about concentrating too much on “school politics” and system performance instead of focusing purely on what the critics stated as the main task of the GEW, improving teachers’ working conditions.⁴⁰⁹ Some clearly expressed their disapproval of the GEW politics and PISA argumentation. Common for the criticism was to remark that the GEW goals of abolishing the selective elements of the system or increasing all-day schooling were not shared objectives among the members.⁴¹⁰ In the research period of this thesis, the criticism received no comments from the GEW officials or the E&W editors, although, publishing it made it clear that multiple opinions existed within the organisation. On the other hand, the fact that the critics took a stand against the GEW’s school political goals might have exactly strengthened the perception of a “turf war” and therefore reinforced the need to remain in the insistent position.

However, there was one attempt to respond to the criticism during the GEW campaign in June 2002 when the GEW authors Welzel and Rödde presented results of a telephone survey of the members’ opinions regarding the goals of the organisation. Although mentioning that the survey did not reach a representative sample, the article concluded that the GEW had the support of the members’ majority.⁴¹¹ The GEW also declared several times to be the “leader of opinions” in education-related discussions.⁴¹² These responses did not acknowledge the opposing statements, nor did they try to build bridges between conflicting opinions. Still, it must be noted that several readers shared the GEW’s educational opinions in their comments, although some were less optimistic than others with respect to the chances of success in system reform.⁴¹³

⁴⁰⁹ Retaiski; Dierks.

⁴¹⁰ Heyde; Grosse, Birgit (2002) Unseriös. E&W 4/2002, 41–42; Wischniewski, Dietmar (2002) PISA und die 68er. E&W 5/2002, 34; Löttgen, Monika (2002) Ungeheuerlich. E&W 5/2002, 34; Burchett-Weckert, Christiane (2002) Sitzenbleiben. E&W 4/2002, 42.

⁴¹¹ Welzel & Rödde, 22.

⁴¹² Welzel, Steffen (2002c) Die Nummer 1 im Schulbereich. E&W 2/2002, 36; Rettet die Bildung. E&W 7–8/2002, 4.

⁴¹³ Michaelis, Rainer (2002) Weltmeister. E&W 2/2002, 40; Elbers, Doris (2002) Schulversagen. E&W 4/2002, 41; Welzel, Hartmut (2002) Falsches System. E&W 6/2002, 33.

What remains significant regarding the regular members' contributions in the E&W is that PISA eventually attracted little attention among them. The few critical comments on PISA were absolute exceptions during my research period. The material analysed in this thesis showed that while the leading figures of the GEW expressed clear stances regarding PISA, most of those members who participated in the debates within the E&W did not discuss PISA at a deeper level. Yet, it must be taken into account that the readers' viewpoints only had a limited space in the magazine at the end of each issue. Still, the debates in the readers' section concentrated on other topics, nonetheless dealing with political matters, such as the War in Afghanistan, the Holocaust and various domestic debates. The scope of the discussed themes gave the impression that the GEW's members were generally very aware of diverse subjects. In this light, it is striking that they did not call PISA into question either. The lack of further discussion may indicate low interest or awareness to the international effects on education. This cannot, however, be confirmed in this analysis. Still, considering that the ordinary members seemed to take less interest in PISA than the GEW officials and regular commentators only reinforced the fact that the definitional process of PISA was left for those who took it for granted and focused on criticising the domestic educational politics.

5 Discussion

The objective of this master's thesis was to examine how the PISA 2000 results were perceived by the GEW and its members, and how they evaluated PISA as an institution. My analysis has shown that the problem representations in the PISA discussions in the GEW's magazine did not question PISA. The PISA results for Germany were accepted as a given indicator of structural, political and social problems in German education. I begin the conclusion by depicting the E&W problem representations after the analytic tools of Bacchi. Apart from definitions of problems I have considered the assumptions, genealogies, silences and effects of the problem representations in my analysis.

Although the E&W contained multiple and sometimes contradictory voices, overall the PISA discussion reflected a common understanding that Germany's low PISA results were a national problem, which required rapid solutions and political consequences. The

situation was often represented to derive from politicians' and teachers' indifference. Altogether many commentators believed that German education suffered from a continuity of harmful societal values, which had led to an unsuccessful educational model.

Behind these representations of problems one could trace three distinguishable lines of assumptions. Firstly, it was implied or at least not contested that the PISA results signified the truth of the state of education in each participant country. Recurrently such presumptions conveyed an impression that positions in the PISA rankings indicated how education should be reformed in that country. Secondly, the representations seemingly expected that the situation in Germany fundamentally differed from other countries' realities. These inferences gave significant importance to the ranking positions. Thirdly, assuming that German school life and politics deviated from "international standards" in an exceptional way suggested that other countries had undergone a certain course of development that Germany had failed to grasp.

Besides representing other countries as a homogeneous group, Germany was also treated as an entity. Especially the initial reactions to PISA gave an impression of a single German educational system without giving much attention to the federal structure and *Länder* autonomy regarding schooling. The PISA-E results changed this pattern; this shift indicated that variation between the *Länder* was perceived with a different eye than variation in international comparison. The fact that PISA-E compared the *Länder* with each other made inevitably visible that the school politics and background factors differed between federal states. Despite this new consideration of contextual particularities such as socioeconomic conditions, the earlier convictions of the "truths" that international PISA results had revealed were not reappraised in the E&W during my research period.

Regarding the genealogy of these problem representations one must consider the recent history of German educational politics, namely the school politics debate in the 1960s and 1970s. This was an aspect also acknowledged in the E&W by various authors. An assertion made by several E&W commentators highlighted that the German political discussion suffered from a continuous lack of reform. Seemingly, this experience reinforced the frustration with the state of the national education on the one hand and on

the other, buttressed the image of PISA as a saviour at last. Behind these problem representations there were, however, larger phenomena that may have shaped the contemporaries. Internationally the collection and comparison of data in the name of evidence-based policymaking was increasingly accepted and nationally, an empirical turn could be distinguished in the German educational thinking⁴¹⁴. Moreover, the OECD's argumentation was understandably appealing to the GEW, since the OECD's PISA reasoning emphasised that it was possible to decrease socioeconomic differences with educational reforms. This was compatible with the GEW's emphasis on comprehensive schooling and social equality.

Although the argument in favour of PISA and against the prevailing educational politics was rather determined in the E&W, there were several remaining issues that were not considered problematic. The historical background of the PISA study and the OECD as an organisation of economic development were not discussed. Another major silence concerned the contextual factors behind each country's PISA results and the historical path-dependencies of educational systems. Several E&W commentators seemed convinced that the ranking positions indicated the success of certain educational reforms, teachers' methods or societal attitudes. This perception, however, attracted less attention towards the end of my research period, which may have occurred because causes for the results were not searched as eagerly after the initial reactions. Additionally, despite the strong trust in the PISA results, the discussions in the E&W demonstrated the contradictory assertions of how the PISA results should actually be interpreted. The way in which the E&W made an effort to understand the PISA results beyond the rankings only showed how ambiguous the assertions surrounding PISA had become. Moreover, the initial taken-for-grantedness of the results seemed to have taken more weight in the argumentation despite these attempts. During my research period there were no comments on the contradictory issues such as the few readers' critical remarks on the PISA argumentation of the E&W. Among these contradictions were also the differences between the OECD's Schleicher and the German PISA expert Baumert's statements, which were not discussed further. In the later PISA discourses, the support for PISA from the representatives of economy was interpreted as further evidence that German national politics were on a false track. These representations did not consider

⁴¹⁴ See e.g. Lundahl & Waldow.

other possible interests of the economy in supporting PISA than the GEW's goal for social equality. Apparently the GEW expected that the concepts of equality, support and opportunities were understood in the same way by all those referring to these ideas.

The GEW's understanding of social equality went deeper than merely highlighting equal opportunities; this was visible for instance in the attitudes towards the Scandinavian welfare model. However, there was variance between authors in this matter. While in comparison to England, pushing and achievement orientation were highlighted, in other occasions softer methods were represented to produce desired educational outcomes. The GEW's interpretation of social equality was also visible in the representation of the German tradition of *Bildung*: it was presumed that equity was an inherent part of the *Bildung* and that the German bourgeoisie had merely misused the concept and created an unequal educational system. Furthermore, the fact that the OECD was seen to promote social equality issues may have had a major impact on the GEW's acceptant attitude towards PISA. International comparison served as legitimising force proving that both equity and high achievement can work simultaneously, unlike what the German political opponents were said to advocate. It thus seemed to be the perceived educational battle in Germany that directed the high regard for the OECD.

For some GEW's commentators the representatives of the economy were eventually characterised as political allies because they supported comprehensive schooling and therefore took a different stand than the German politicians. It seemed that this perceived division between the more conservative German politicians and those who supported comprehensive schools was a reason to disregard any other possible conflicts with the representatives of the economy. After all, several E&W articles had also expressed critical concerns of market orientation and economic principles in education. What seemed to matter was whether different stakeholders were seen to "follow PISA" or not; further issues were set aside. The threats of globalisation and loss of national control over education that many German critics stated in the mid-2000s⁴¹⁵ also caused concerns in the GEW's discourses. The only difference was that in the E&W discussions, instruments such as PISA and their implementation had nothing to do with these threats. In other words, PISA and market economic interests were treated as

⁴¹⁵ See e.g. Martens & Wolf; Gruschka et al.

completely separate topics. While the impact of globalisation was represented as a threat to public education – for instance in the form of market orientation and private international influence on public national goods – no such threat was perceived in the OECD’s educational influence. This became visible for example in the expert role attached to the PISA director Schleicher in the E&W, as even his assertions on behalf of privatisation were not called into question. Partially the E&W material thus showed signs of what Bellmann and Waldow have called “the peculiar alliance” of technocratic educational reform and reform pedagogy⁴¹⁶. If the lack of GEW’s critical scrutiny to PISA is considered in the light of the academic criticism directed at the impact of PISA⁴¹⁷, it seems even more astonishing because of the leftist and generally critical positions within the GEW. While the critics have highlighted the connections of an assessment culture to the increased market liberal ideals in education in recent decades⁴¹⁸, in the E&W discussion the OECD’s discourses were not linked to this threat at the time.

In regard to the effects that the problem representations may cause, the discourses in the E&W gave a black-and-white impression of PISA and the consequences that should follow. This appeared especially in the GEW officials’ and E&W editors’ argumentation; the members’ letters made less statements regarding PISA. The GEW’s argumentation simplified the issue contrasting the “right” consequences with the “wrong” ones. PISA became to denote a “scientific” and “realistic” approach opposed to the perceived continuation in German politics and education, that is, acting “ideologically” and “politically” instead of proceeding rationally. Such a problem representation demonstrated how PISA was represented as the absolute truth and created an impression that simplistic solutions were available. This limited the possibilities to question the ways PISA could be utilised for various arguments. Besides these discursive effects, the problem representations in the E&W also shaped and constituted especially politicians and teachers in a certain way: they were represented to fundamentally differ from other countries’ politicians and teachers in their willingness to contribute to a just and high-quality education.

⁴¹⁶ Bellmann, Johannes & Waldow, Florian (2007) Die merkwürdige Ehe zwischen technokratischer Bildungsreform und empathischer Reformpädagogik. *Bildung und Erziehung*, 60(4), 481–503.

⁴¹⁷ E.g. Sellar & Lingard 2013; Grek 2009.

⁴¹⁸ E.g. Auld & Morris, Stromquist; Simola et al.

With the help of these analytical questions from Bacchi, one could distinguish a taken-for-granted attitude towards PISA in the E&W. Nevertheless, the multiplicity of the viewpoints in the magazine should not be forgotten. There was no single line of opinion and emphasis among the articles and positions expressed in the magazine. Especially readers' letters demonstrated various standpoints and contradictory stances. Clearly the magazine did not exclude opposing opinions, even with regard to comprehensive schooling. On the other hand, because of this seemingly open line one could infer that if there had been differing or questioning opinions to PISA, they would have been published in the magazine.

An essential part of the PISA discussion in the E&W concentrated on the past and present experiences of the national political situation and the expectations that with PISA this perceived continuity could be changed. Especially the GEW officials represented the problem deriving from the polemic nature of national politics in Germany. Despite the multiplicity of voices in the E&W, this line of argumentation was discernible throughout the research material.

It seemed that the OECD's concepts received such positive connotations partially because of the strong resistance to present and past national politics and to the perceived cultural atmosphere of selection and exclusion in Germany. In other words, my analysis has shown how the context had a decisive role in how the GEW actors framed PISA. Consequently, the roles attached to PISA were selective and dismissed other dimensions of PISA and its political impact. This was also how the German tradition of *Bildung* was portrayed in some representations. The concepts themselves, PISA and *Bildung*, were comprehended as timeless virtues without historical contexts.

Seemingly there was no space for querying the background of PISA because the experienced national context constructed the problem and the framework in which PISA was discussed. According to Bacchi, problem representations are contingent, which is why it is important to scrutinise them in different cultural contexts in order to understand how culturally bound certain problematisations may be.⁴¹⁹ My results

⁴¹⁹ Bacchi, 14.

demonstrate how PISA was functionalised in the E&W through a narrow national lense. The way that PISA was utilised as legitimising evidence conforms Tillmann et al.'s findings of the German policymakers' context. Although teachers' agendas and positions differed from those of the politicians, the pattern in which PISA received a political function was similar.

While the attention in the E&W was directed at the national political context, there seemed to be no need to question PISA or the international influence coming from the OECD. PISA as an institution was conceived as neutral. In contrast, German politicians were represented to utilise PISA for their own purposes. This, however, did not undermine the conviction that PISA could be interpreted in a "right" way.

The lack of scrutiny could also indicate that the institutions were not experienced as something that could be questioned. One might consider, to what extent it might have been possible for a political actor such as the GEW to question an authoritative agency such as the OECD. This analysis has, nevertheless, shown that there were several German academics who had a critical attitude towards PISA and its implementation in politics. Moreover, as Kreft and Hartong have pointed out, the GEW had expressed criticism of international achievement assessments before PISA⁴²⁰. The lack of critical scrutiny of the OECD's interests and background of PISA seems astonishing also considering that in my research material the GEW generally did not refrain from criticising issues that it considered relevant. The readers' letters were rather determined in their argumentation as well, but hardly discussed PISA as an institution. Moreover, considering how critically globalisation effects and political actors were scrutinised in the magazine, it seems unlikely that the GEW would have spared any criticism if it had had such.

Still, this thesis cannot answer the question to what extent the GEW actually believed that the OECD or its assessments were the best indicators to determine what was best for German education. My analysis could, however, show that during this particular time frame they had accepted PISA into their vocabulary. Examining from the

⁴²⁰ Kreft, 167; Hartong, 208–209.

viewpoint of conceptual history,⁴²¹ these results demonstrate how undisputed the symbolic meaning of a concept can become. I argue that it is not insignificant how the first connotations and experiences of PISA were drawn into the minds of the GEW's educationists and shaped their self-understanding of their professional field. However, PISA as an instrument as well as discourses surrounding it have been developing since the beginning of the 2000s. Further enquiry would thus be necessary to discover how the GEW's perception of PISA may have changed along with the increasing international criticism of the OECD's education politics towards the 2010s.

In the end, there was a notable difference in how *national* was represented in comparison to *international* in the E&W sources. The grass seemed greener outside the German borders. Within national dimensions it was focused on political conflict, whereas everything regarding 'international' appeared in neutral or positive terms. The meaning of PISA was equalled to international comparison and thereby presented without context.

Admittedly, comparison must occur from one's own point of view, as it would be hardly possible to hold a similar scope of contextual information regarding external circumstances. Moreover, cross-national comparison can contribute a great deal to the understanding of one's own context from a new perspective. Nevertheless, as critical educational literature on the impact of international assessments remarks⁴²², such comparisons entail problematic issues. The point of this analysis has not been to suggest that empirical research on education should not be conducted. Nor do I wish to question the goals of socioeconomic equality and more effective, high quality learning and teaching as a basis of educational politics. What I consider problematic in the PISA discussion is, however, something that my analysis has further demonstrated: the tendency of attributing legitimacy to empirical results and their "implementation" without precision and even in presence of contradictory arguments. This thesis has shown how the ascendancy of an instrument such as PISA can work, and that it may easily be adapted to an existing national context and harnessed to particular political views. Moreover, perceptions of PISA within the GEW followed the "textbook

⁴²¹ See Hyrkkänen, 124–135.

⁴²² E.g. Simola & Rinne; Simola et al.; Nóvoa & Yariv-Mashal.

example” use of PISA that Waldow has observed in Germany — the comparative view was selective in its references to international success⁴²³.

This does not mean that assessments such as PISA could not provide significant results for educational research. However, as Bellmann has pointed out, there seems to be no consensus even among statisticians on how the PISA results should be interpreted and what their impact on politics is and ought to be⁴²⁴. Politicians, OECD experts or educational professionals should therefore not overlook the extent to which PISA or other achievement assessments may attain a political function.

⁴²³ Waldow 2010b, 482.

⁴²⁴ Bellmann 2007, 424.

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⁴²⁵ Here I have not distinguished contemporary literature from research literature, because many articles and books are used in both categories.

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